Act 5

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Act 5.

Further removed to the west than Miyama town of Fuyuki, the winding state highway stretched westwards with its back towards the city's lights. Meanwhile, an undeveloped piece of forest waited for visitors further up the road. Continuing beyond even the prefectural border, the state highway silently meandered on.

Although there were two lanes on the road, no crossing cars can be seen even with the sparse streetlights. The state highway in the dead of night seemed to fade from memory and into the silence.

In such a silent night, a silver beast flew by.

Mercedes-Benz 300SL Coupe. The flowing, elegant, streamlined body with a scent of antiquity resembled a noble lady, while the roaring of the Inline-6 SOHC engine was like that of a fierce beast. And behind the steering wheel of the classic sedan recklessly going beyond 100 kilometers per hour - were unexpectedly the slender wrists of a young lady.

"Hey, this goes pretty fast, doesn't it?"

Irisviel, who held the steering wheel and whose face was full of pleased smiles, said. Sitting in the passenger's seat, Saber's face was full of nervousness, and she barely managed to squeeze out a stiff smile and a nod.

"In-Indeed, unexpectedly, this is...some rather... skillful... driving..."

"Right? I had special training, even though it may not look like it."

That being said, based on the unfamiliar way she dealt with the gears, she's far from being a proficient driver.

"Among all the toys Kiritsugu brought to the Einzbern castle, I favor this one the most. I was always just running circles in the castle grounds, and today is the first time for me to drive in such a wide space. It's wonderful!"

"A toy, huh..."

There won't be any objections to call something like a skateboard or bicycle a toy. But for a machine with a speed of over 100 kilometers per hour on a serpentine road, it is a mismatch of classes. People would never call things that can put their lives in danger with the smallest mistakes as toys in ordinary situations.

Although it is a classic sedan made more than forty years ago, it possesses a 2996cc. M198 engine and its maximum speed is 260 kilometers per hour. Irisviel's reckless roam, compared to the car's potential ability, is merely a beginning prelude.

Apparently, Emiya Kiritsugu had specially prepared this car in the Einzbern castle earlier on, so Irisviel and Saber can have transportation apart from walking once they enter Fuyuki.

For over half a month, this car had been parked in the hotel's underground barricade. Now they are driving their precious car towards the Einzberns' castle residence.

"Hmm. Wait a minute, Irisviel. Haven't you been driving on the right side until just a moment ago?"

"Ah, that's right."

Irisviel nodded casually as if it was a very small mistake, and the car gave a jerk and moved onto the cruising lane.

Irisviel had never been outside of the Einzbern castle ever since she was born; for her, it is obviously her first time driving on a highway. Saber has been paying attention to her line of sight since they took off. Obviously Irisviel does not know anything about street signs. Although driving on the left is written in the law, it appears Irisviel doesn't even know this.

At least she could understand a little of what traffic lights mean, but that only went as far as *considering* slowing down when she saw the red light. Although right now it is midnight with little traffic, it would be a miracle for them to be able to safely arrive at their destination.

"...Do we still have a long way to go to reach the Einzbern castle in this land?"

"I heard it will only take one hour to reach by car. When we get close, we should be able to see it..."

Saber did not stop wishing for this dangerous journey to be over, even if only a second sooner. It is already very fortunate that no cars are coming

towards them on the midnight highway, but the fact that the winding road still posed a great danger filled Saber's blood with adrenaline, as if it were right before a battle. As a Servant, she possesses extraordinary reflexes and strength, and can immediately carry Irisviel outside the car to escape if danger presents. However, this legendary sports car worth ten million yen would then be reduced to an unrecognizable pile of scrap iron. That doesn't fit with Saber's frugal economics.

"...Wouldn't it have been better to hire a chauffeur?"

"Of course not. That would be boring- no, that would be too dangerous. After all, once we enter Fuyuki city, we can be attacked by other master’s at any time. You're the one who doesn't want to see innocent people being dragged into this, Saber."

"That is true..."

Just which one is more dangerous on this mountainous road: being attacked by other Masters, or Irisviel's driving skills? - Saber was half-seriously considering this question when a cold wave reached her senses like the edge of a blade.

"Stop the car!"

"Aye?"

Not understanding Saber's sudden warning, the unmindful Irisviel asked dumbly.

Saber didn't have time to explain to her. She forcefully stretched her torso across the driver's seat, took hold of the steering wheel with one hand, and slammed her left foot tip-first on the brakes.

The reason Saber could immediately make decisions, enabling her to control this rampaging machine, is her skill of Riding as a Servant. She can completely understand the control of all ridden equipment both known and unknown to her.

Fortunately, the car maintained a straight path during the sharp break and did not spin furiously.

The tires of the Mercedes skidded on the asphalt, emitting clouds of white smoke. As the car's uncontrollable slide continued, Saber once again confirmed the feeling that set her nerves on edge.

Without a doubt, it was definitely the scent of a Servant. Speak of the devil, indeed.

"Saber, that's-"

Irisviel fell silent. A figure of strange appearance emerged on the far stretch of the road lit by the Mercedes' headlights.

The tall figure before them, as though not even considering the danger of the speeding car, stood unperturbed in the middle of the road.

A luxurious robe of ancient design; sanguineous scarlet patterns adorned the pitch-black fabric. Those abnormally big eyes easily remind one of nocturnal animals. Even if one were to ignore these bizarre points, no ordinary passerby would appear in such a place at this time.

The car's momentum was overcome by the wheels' friction and the Mercedes finally stopped. There was barely ten meters between the car and the figure in front of it.

"... Saber?"

Saber quickly analyzed the current situation, then said to Irisviel.

"Get off the car as soon as I do. But don't go too far."

If the opponent is a Servant, a car with its steel frame would be as fragile as a mere cardboard box. If they were to remain in the car, they would have been defenseless. After all, it's better to shift to a better defense position.

Saber opened the gull-wing door and stepped into the frigid night. Mixed with the smell coming from the trees rustled by the night wind was the acrid stench of burnt tire.

The figure in front of her eyes was different from the five she's seen before. If it's a Servant she hasn't met yet, it would be Caster, or perhaps Assassin... so Saber thought.

Although Saber and Irisviel, who didn't know about the ruse that occurred in the Tōsaka residence the other night, could not eliminate the possibility of Assassin, this Servant who was neither running away nor in hiding but standing proudly in front of them doesn't seem to be Assassin. Using the process of elimination, there's only one conclusion - the figure in front of them is Caster.

However, ...

Is the expression on his face really the expression of a warrior about to do battle?

The confused King of Knights surveyed the opponent's countenance once again.

He was smiling, which in itself is understandable. For a warrior to be filled with joy upon facing their decided place of death is decidedly not uncommon. But that was not Caster's expression. It was as though they were long-lost brothers finally reuniting, a face shining so purely with delight it was almost piddling...

Before the unnerved Saber could challenge his identity, Caster betrayed her estimations and acted.

Caster bowed his head deferentially, knelt down on the asphalt road like a courtier being presented before a king.

"I've been waiting, your majesty the holy maiden."

"Huh...?"

Saber was getting more and more lost with the situation. Although she was once a king and accepted the genuflection of countless lords and heroes, she had no memories for this man in front of her eyes. This man was not one of her former subjects of Camelot.

Firstly, the title 'holy maiden' is very strange. When she governed Britain as King Arthur, she never exposed the fact that she is in truth a woman even at the end.

Irisviel, who got off the Mercedes after a while, hid behind Saber, who was full of nervous guard, and silently observed Caster.

"Saber, do you know this person?"

"No, I don't have any impression of him -"

As if he had heard Saber and Irisviel's murmurs, Caster lifted up his head and said:

"... Oh, oh, how can you say that? Don't you remember me?"

In reply to his ever more exaggerated words, Saber was astonished.

"Whatever you may say, this is the first time I've met you - I don't know where you have gone wrong, but... maybe you've got the wrong person?"

"Oh, wuwuwu..."

Caster began to sob as if he was very sad, and his hands were clawing his hair. His extremely happy expression up till now changed completely, his strange, greasy complexion twisted by dismay and dejection like a caricature. Just based on this, it can be seen that he is a dangerous man whose emotions change at a whim.

"It's me! I am your forever most royal servant Gilles de Rais! I've always prayed for your resurrection, always waited for the miraculous day when I can meet you again. I came here to the ends of time for that purpose, Jeanne!"

When Irisviel heard the man's words, she caught her breath.

"Gilles de Rais...?"

This is already the second Servant to declare his real name in front of them. Although his purpose is unknown, the name is indeed the renowned title given to Caster in the current world.

But for Saber, once his origin became clear, doubt simply hardened into denial.

"I don't know your name, nor do I know of this Jeanne."

Sighing half with shock after Saber's declaration, Caster let out even more scattered wheezing.

"What... could it be, that you've forgotten? Who you were in mortal life?!"

Saber was getting annoyed with this situation in which she couldn't get her point clear, so she regarded Caster grimly and said:

"Since you've already declared your name, then according to the knights' decorum I'll tell you my true name too. I am Artoria, the rightful child of Uther Pendragon, and the king of Britain."

Caster, lost for words, stared in blank amazement at this girl in front of him, who puffed her chest and proudly declared her name. And then-

"Oh! Oh! Oh waaaaaa!!"

Caster began a fit of weeping which was almost a shriek, while unsightly hammering his fists on the ground.

"How painful, how tragic is this! Not only did she lose her memories, even her mind is this befuddled... you... you! God, why are you so cruel to this lovely maiden of mine?"

"What are you talking about? To start with, I'm not -"

"Jeanne, I understand why you won't admit it. You, who originally was more devoted to God and believed in Him deeper than anyone else, was instead discarded by God. When you were sentenced as a witch and executed God did not give you any help or salvation. It is not without reason that you're now acting in this way."

Saber suddenly felt a repulsive feeling completely different from fear. It was as if every single hair in her body was standing on their ends.

The man in front of her didn't hear Saber's words at all, and never wanted to hear them in the first place. He had concluded based on his own delusions regarding Saber, and he has no doubts toward this conclusion. Under the control of this train of thoughts, none of Saber's words can go into Caster's head.

"Wake up! Jeanne! You don't need to be bewildered by the likes of God! You are the holy maiden of Orleans, the savior of France, Jeanne d'Arc!"

"That's enough! This is unsightly!"

Saber shouted, no longer showing confusion or restraint and openly displaying her disgust towards the kneeling Caster.

"I am Saber, and you are Caster, a Heroic Spirit. We are both Servants who fight for the Grail. The reason we met here is nothing more, and nothing less."

"... Saber, there's no point in saying anything to this man."

Behind the agitated King of Knights, Irisviel rebuked her.

As Saber - that is, Artoria - is an incomplete Heroic Spirit, she would not possess the knowledge that surpasses time and space one gains when one has reached the Throne of Heroes. Therefore, she is not aware of that tale tainted by insanity, the legend of "Bluebeard", Baron Gilles de Rais.

Gilles de Rais rose to the position of general as a savior and hero of France, but he turned his back on glory when he indulged in the immorality and lust of black magic. The 'monstre sacré' who eventually slaughtered hundreds of youths...

Gilles' descent into madness occurred about the same time as the final fate of the valiant Jeanne d'Arc, who he fought beside. Thus, there are many legends that have connected the two. The deep-rooted delusion that the Heroic Spirit called forth by the Grail, Gilles de Rais, is seeing now can be nothing but madness. It's impossible to know just how much similarity exists between Saber Artoria and Joan of Arc, but the two of them must be very similar indeed. No matter what, Gilles - Caster already firmly believes Saber to be that person he's always thought of and did not allow any doubt to be present.

"Jeanne, please stop referring to yourself as Saber, or to me as Caster. We will soon be free from the bound of this shackle called Servant. The Holy Grail War is about to be over!"

"That's just your own wishful thinking."

This time it was Irisviel who answered in place of Saber, who was already too angry to speak.

"Hey, General de Rais, since you said the war is already over, what about the Grail?"

"It's so obvious; the omnipotent Grail, that wish-granting machine is already in my hands!"

Caster, full of satisfied smiles, said proudly.

"My only wish was that the holy maiden Jeanne d'Arc would be resurrected, and now this wish had already been fulfilled! Without even the need to compete with anyone, my wish had already become reality! The Grail has already chosen me – Gilles – without even fighting at all!"

Ding! A shrill sound reverberated. The asphalt before Caster's eyes split perfectly into two.

It was Saber's invisible sword. Although Caster couldn't see it, he could feel the aura of the sharp blade right on the tip of his nose.

"If you continue to ridicule all the wishes of us Heroic Spirits - I will cut you down without mercy, Caster."

While her words were free of emotions, Saber's voice itself was as cold as a blade.

"Come, stand up. Knights can't attack someone who's kneeling on the ground. If you're also a soldier, then you can keep your cunning arguments to yourself, and obtain the Grail with straightforward warfare. Let me, Saber, be your first opponent!"

The mad flame in Caster's eyes disappeared.

His face, which was twisted with excitement, also gradually returned to its calm. Caster lifted his head up to look at Saber; the formidable will harbored within his gaze did not change the slightest.

It was a look of silent resolution. He had merely changed his determination into an even firmer belief.

"It seems just words won't be enough... Is your heart still sealed, Jeanne?"

Caster's gloomy voice no longer contained the lament just then.

"Then I am very sorry. It seems there's a need to use enforced therapy on you. Whatever it may be – I will definitely complete all the preparations for you next time."

The long black robe floated backwards abruptly, creating a very big distance between him and Saber. Caster, standing up again, was almost a different person from the figure kneeling on the ground sobbing just then. A great air of majestic command that seemed to be able to stain the entire earth red with blood emitted from his person... not only Heroic Spirits, but even tyrants will feel the oppressing tension of fear.

The man in front of her is undoubtedly not an easy enemy – Saber, who stood in front of Caster, knew this from her instincts without a doubt.

"I swear to you, Jeanne. The next time we meet, I will definitely... save your soul from the curse of God."

"Save your words. Leave if you do not have the will to command a sword."

To Saber's cold reply, Caster silently removed his material form and disappeared into the night.

Letting out a long sigh, Saber also removed her battle tension. Irisviel collapsed onto the fender of the Mercedes, exhausted.

"Confronting such a senseless opponent... was rather tiresome."

"Right. However, I'm going to chop him up before he opens his mouth next time – I'm going to throw up if someone like that stayed a minute longer."

Although Caster has already left, Saber still said that indignantly.

"You regret how he escaped so easily?"

"Uh huh. I was just about to make him pay for his behavior of speaking absolute nonsense here - is what I want to say."

For a brief moment meekness covered her anger, as Saber reluctantly furrowed her brows.

"But in all honesty, it might be that Caster's retreat is a good piece of luck for tonight's me."

"Aye? Really?"

Hearing Saber say such discontented words, Irisviel was very surprised.

For an opponent so skilled in thaumaturgical battle as Servant Caster, his bane would be Servant Saber, who has the strongest magic resistance. If the duo actually started fighting, Saber should achieve victory with an overwhelming advantage.

But Saber, with an expression that even she doesn't completely understand, shook her head with a bitter smile.

"That Caster... was a bit different. Or he's not quite the same compared with other magi. Although I can't be sure either... but it felt too dangerous for me to fight him in this condition of having my left hand sealed."

Saber's sixth sense was also strengthened to a degree due to her class's specialty, almost to the level of precognition. If even she felt uneasy about the enemy, Irisviel also had to reevaluate Caster.

"In any case, Lancer should be first..."

"Yes. But it's extremely fortunate that Lancer is also a noble warrior, not escaping or hiding himself away. He's also looking forward to our duel."

Although they are each other's enemies, Saber was sympathetic to Lancer's spirit. But even so, this did not erase Irisviel's tinge of unease. After all, no

matter how the Servant is full of the spirit of chivalry, it's hard to say how much of that holds true for the Master.

And the King of Knights, who was put on the shackle of being a Servant, is she still fighting with the reputation of the sword...? When she thought of this, Irisviel couldn't help herself but feel sad.

Unknown to Irisviel, Saber, or even Caster who retreated first, the entire process of this chance meeting between them was under the surveillance of pursuers.

In the dense forest connected to the state highway, the pursuers wearing the ghastly skull masks concealed themselves on the treetops swallowed by the darkness and surveyed all that just happened with a vigilant eye.

Not just melting into the shadows; the pursuers who cut all of their scents to evade Saber's senses seemed to be shadows themselves. No one else can achieve this apart from Assassin. Looks like Assassin, according to Kotomine Kirei's command, followed Saber and Irisviel from the warehouses to here.

Assassin, who was originally just given the mark of Irisviel, Einzbern's Master, obtained an unexpected gain. The last Servant who didn't even show himself in the melee of the warehouse district, Caster, was finally discovered by Assassin.

Although the scent of Caster, who departed in spiritual form, is quickly fading, Assassin's sharp spiritual sense can still detect it. Right now, it is the best time for pursuit.

"Of course, that is not a task for you."

A voice suddenly sounded behind Assassin. A vague outline hazily emerged from the dim forest – it is, unexpectedly, another skull mask.

The second Assassin differed from the previous Assassin only in body shape, while the mask they wore, and the black cloak attire were identical. Meanwhile, both differed from the Assassin who reconnoitered in the warehouse district in body shape and build. Although they are Servants of the same class, they are all clearly, unmistakably different individuals.

"Then what about giving it to you?"

"Yes. You only need to keep following Saber and her Master... By the way, did Master Kirei see the situation here?"

"No, master Kirei did not share perceptions with me."

The Assassin who initially tailed Irisviel shook his head. Looks like it was another Assassin who reconnoitered in the warehouse district just then.

The second Assassin smacked his lips when he heard this reply.

"Just to be on the safe side, we should still report to master Kirei the things that happened here..."

"Give that job to me."

A third voice followed. It's nothing to be surprised about now; another white skull mask appeared in the darkness.

This time, it was a child-like Assassin with a shrill voice and short stature. Perhaps no one knows just how many Assassins gathered here.

The monstrous sound of the engine of the Mercedes once again resounded in the night sky, and it sped away roaring in the state highway. Maybe Irisviel and Saber hastily took the road again.

At the same time the three shadows nodded to each other, and also disappeared like a whirlwind in the vast night.

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In the darkness as thick as blood, only one solitary candle flicked. The dim candlelight reflected Uryū Ryūnosuke's handsome face.

Scarlet blood completely smeared these fingers too delicate for a man. In front of the man, who sat beside a long table, three rows of raw meat that reflected bright red were placed.

They were intestines. On the long table were human intestines.

Ryūnosuke stared intently at the intestines in front of him, then picked up a tuning fork with his left hand and hit it on the edge of the table. Ding. The tuning fork emitted a clear sound.

Before the clear sound of the tuning completely disappeared, he quickly poked everywhere on the intestines with his right hand.

At that time –

Ahhh...

Haaa...

A seemingly agonizing sound suddenly came out of the darkness.

Ryūnosuke listened carefully to the sound emitted and nodded satisfactorily after he compared it with the residue echo of the tuning fork.

"Very good, so here it's ‘mi'."

As he spoke, he marked a point on the intestines with a pin. Many similar marks of musical notes have already been made on the incessantly quivering intestine.

The intestines seemed to be still alive. To be correct, it seems the owner of the intestines was still alive.

On the crucifix on top of the long table, a girl who was sobbing incessantly with pain was tied up. A horizontal cut was made on her abdomen, and the innards that were dragged out were being fondled with in Ryūnosuke's hand.

Even Bluebeard praised Ryūnosuke for his idea of making a living human into a pipe organ to play lamenting music. To make the girl picked as the material does not die from massive blood loss or infections, Bluebeard placed a few healing and rejuvenation spells on her body, and specially made some adjustments to prevent the pain from numbing her brain.

Ryūnosuke had always been frustrated with the fact that the human body stops its life-like activities as soon as it encounters a slightly extreme stimulation.

But now, with the help of thaumaturgy, all these previous hurdles were solved easily. Now, Ryūnosuke can flutter his wings of perception freely, improvising at will.

"Very good, so one more time. 'Do re mi~'"

Ryūnosuke hummed as he pressed down on the intestine keyboard. But the sound of agony that accompanied his movement was very unharmonious with his own tune.

"... Hm?"

The tuner smeared with blood furrowed his brows and tilted his head, and once again pressed down on the place he just fine tuned with the tuning fork. However, the sound made by the girl tied on the crucifix was completely different from the marked noted.

Upon careful reflection, although the stimulation happens in the same place it doesn't guarantee that the moaning made would be the same. This human instrument is flawed in its basic conceptual design.

"Huh... what a failure."

Ryūnosuke sighed unhappily and scratched his head.

After the human canopy he tried hard to design yesterday, this human instrument also ended in failure. If this frustration keeps going on, even Ryūnosuke would lose confidence.

But just then, Ryūnosuke suddenly remembered what Bluebeard said to him in consolation after his failure at making the canopy yesterday.

"No matter what, the idea is the most important. Even though the final result is not as satisfactory as imagined, the act of challenging it already matters a lot by itself."

Ryūnosuke was inspired by the words of the exalted fiend. For a youth who was never understood by anyone, who created art alone, the encouragement of these words held great meaning.

Hard work is needed. Ryūnosuke once again picked up his spirits. It won't do to be afraid of failure. Failure is the mother of success; a long journey begins from the ground beneath his feet.

After all, he has to think progressively. It's too early to discard the making of this human instrument. If he can find the root of the problem, he might be able to find some solution.

And, sounds aside, the expression of pain the girl had when he fondled with the intestine taken out of her body was also extraordinarily alluring. To discard such a precious expression would more or less be a waste.

The air, full of the stench of blood, suddenly felt heavy. The density of prana floating in the air became even thicker. All this signaled the owner of this thaumaturgical workshop has returned.

"Ah, welcome back, Sir."

Appearing gradually in the candlelight, Bluebeard, Servant Caster, didn't even give Ryūnosuke a glance. The emotionless face, compared with the singing and dancing expression of joy when he left, was a complete one-hundred-eighty-degree turn.

Looks like something unpleasant happened while he was out. Although Ryūnosuke was a bit worried, he still couldn't wait to report the fruits of his research to him.

"Sir, I'm very sorry. As you said, the instrument didn't work. But I– "

"–not enough."

"Aye?"

Ryūnosuke haven't figured out what the sentence suddenly uttered by Bluebeard meant. Caster left the shocked Ryūnosuke at the side, stretched out a hand from inside the black robe, and placed it on the gasping girl tied on the crucifix like the claw of an eagle.

"It's definitely not enough! This degree!"

"Ah, yeah. I figured that out too… Huh?"

Ryūnosuke's sentence stopped halfway through. Caster's spider-like fingers gradually increased in force; the girl's head was squashed to pieces in his hand as if it was a fruit.

"T-This…"

Ryūnosuke wasn't very unhappy with Bluebeard's attitude towards him. He understood that right now he was in an emotionally agitated state and was completely ignorant of Ryūnosuke's existence.

"Oh, you abominable God, even now you still bind Jeanne's soul and are unwilling to let her go! These blasphemous sacrifices are not yet enough!"

There was no light of reason in Bluebeard's eyes, who was roaring with spit flying from his mouth. Although Ryūnosuke didn't know what happened, the Jeanne he spoke of must be the armored girl they saw in the crystal ball.

Probably trauma caused by emotional problems with his ex.

Ryūnosuke began to pity him. Although they haven't spent a long time together, Ryūnosuke knew this odd-looking fiend in front of him is in fact extremely simple in his emotions.

"I must let her know that in this world the so-called God is only a hollow myth. Things like save the entire world are only boasting lies. The prayers of the silent lamb will never be passed on to Heaven!"

"Hum, yes. I understand, Sir."

Chiming along, Ryūnosuke obviously had no idea what Bluebeard's words meant, and he had no intention of trying to find it out; he thinks it's very vulgar to barge in on other people's emotional problems.

"Just blaspheming God is not enough! We must also prove to the world the powerlessness of God's authority and the hypocrisy of God's love! We need to prove God does not have the ability to carry out judgment! No matter how much evil you've committed you will not suffer God's punishment. Isn't it so, Ryūnosuke?"

"Ah, stuff like God are just boring old tricks that stupid people believe in. Sir, you're so much cooler compared to that fake God."

"Then, let us blaspheme God even more vigorously! We will pile the sacrifices of blasphemy as high as mountains and place this scene in front of her."

Toward Bluebeard's declaration, Ryūnosuke contemplated it a little.

"Um, that means... from now on its quantity over quality?"

"Yes, exactly! You're indeed Ryūnosuke! You understood my meaning very well."

When he saw that Ryūnosuke completely understood what he meant, Bluebeard immediately had a face full of smiles and clapped the other's shoulder. Ryūnosuke got used to his extreme change of temperament ages ago.

Only that, to the change of methods he spoke of before, Ryūnosuke has absolutely no interest in.

"Ryūnosuke, how many children are still locked in the cells?"

"... There are still eleven of them alive. Three died when I just played a little with them."

"Very good. Start with those eleven; make them sacrifices as soon as possible. When we're finished with them, we'll capture other children as replacement before tomorrow morning."

"That's... a bit of a pity."

After all, mass slaughter doesn't fit Ryūnosuke's taste. At maximum, he enjoys the art of killing, and isn't a killing machine. Such acts that did not savor the feeling of the kill, but merely piled corpses into mountains, were not much different from wars or natural disasters. It is a waste of lives. Only by slaughtering people one by one can you experience the wonders of life.

Bluebeard perceived Ryūnosuke's discontent; therefore, with his face full of angelic smiles, he spoke to Ryūnosuke like someone reasoning with a naughty child.

"Say, Ryūnosuke, this isn't the time to be stingy. Every life in this world is our property. Therefore, you need to have the right kind of attitude and a heart as generous as a king. Feel free to waste. Please do remember your wealth is never going to run out. Only then, are you fit to be called my Master."

"Like a king?"

Yes. Ryūnosuke is very rich.

Ryūnosuke is not even remotely interested in things like currency. For him, the only thing with expendable value is human life. Also, he, who obtained Bluebeard's help, won't be persecuted by the law no matter how he kills people. He is free to kill whenever, wherever, and using whatever method. Only that, these powers were granted to him by Bluebeard.

If one can do anything he desires and waste in whatever ways he likes with everything in this world, it's effectively the same as owning all these things. Even the Pope and the President won't be able to compare with him. Uryū Ryūnosuke is currently the richest man in the world.

"But I still think we should plan a bit on how we use it."

"Ryūnosuke, you've been poisoned too deeply by this capitalist society. Living in this era, it's inevitable for you have such thoughts. But you need to know that for nobles, waste is a virtue. Someone who possesses wealth has

a duty to exhibit his wealth to the world. Only by doing that can you show the brilliance of wealth and make it more meaningful."

"Hum..."

Bluebeard's few words completely convinced Ryūnosuke. This master of death and destruction once again received new inspiration.

Anyways, like what Bluebeard said, just concentrate on getting rid of those kids tonight. Maybe he can find some new ways to play in the short time period. Ryūnosuke became more excited as he thought about this.

But even so –

Although he accepted Bluebeard's point, Ryūnosuke could not forget the figure of the girl who had been used as the human instrument.

Her face, that had been squashed by Bluebeard and which was no longer visible – was originally quite cute.

-149:47:12

Looking down from the 32nd floor-- the top floor-- of Fuyuki's Hyatt hotel. There is no building taller than this in all of Fuyuki.

This title of the highest building will soon become that of the soon-to-be-completed Shinto shopping center. But because the Shinto shopping center is still under construction, this Hyatt hotel is top for already completed buildings.

Accompanying the unstoppable growth of Shinto, there will be more and more new hotels. But the Hyatt hotel, which has the most advanced facilities and best service standards, will not give up this status to anyone else. It's not only the hotel's managers and staff who think so; even the hotel's customers are amazed by Hyatt's high-quality service and management.

But not even living in such a luxurious room, sitting in the real leather sofa by the window, could ease Kayneth Archibald El-Melloi's depression in the slightest.

To him, the items of this room are merely 'a wasteful gathering'. It's merely a somber room, some expensive furniture, and some fancy everyday items. To Kayneth who's been born into aristocracy, there's nothing he can't stand more than originally common things being dressed up in fancy outfits to appear falsely aristocratic. But right now, that's exactly what this hotel room is like. There isn't the slightest bit of historical background or cultural heritage to this room. It is merely a pigsty decorated by a luxurious appearance.

But the instigator of this lowly feeling is not limited to just this hotel; this extremely tiny island nation known as Japan is filled with things that leave Kayneth with an unhappy, ugly feeling.

Even the tiny island of Hong Kong can give off a very local, folk-style feeling. But right now, Fuyuki's Shinto does not show even a bit of its local culture. Like now, overlooking the city's night scenery from a high spot, there is no way for you to guess exactly in which city of which country you are. Simply gathering the most common items and putting them together-- if he were to be asked what exactly this city is, Kayneth would say it is merely like a mountain of rubbish.

If this easternmost island nation had preserved its original, honest backwater fishing village feeling then it would be much more interesting than it is now... but unfortunately when it comes to the ability to comprehend things like this, a race like the Japanese probably could not do it. This undeveloped country which did not even have a constitution a hundred years ago wants to forge forward and compete with western countries by purely relying on technological science and financial development, as if they wanted to unabashedly force their way into the ranks of the developed countries. It is indeed very difficult to reason with these people.

Kayneth used a finger to gently tap his head, which has a slight headache due to his annoyance, and sighed irately.

In reality, he isn't the type of person to get upset over small things such as these, but something else is the cause of his irritation.

The wide screen TV in front of him suddenly stopped its late-night program and began broadcasting urgent news. The newscaster is at the scene, reporting live on an explosion caused by sources unknown on a warehouse street by the coastline of Fuyuki.

According to nearby residents who heard the explosion, firetrucks were on the scene about four hours ago. Although there is no news yet, those police who've already begun their investigation on-site are definitely hiding their

findings. How can the ignorant, common people be able to make a correct judgment on something that surpasses their knowledge?

It's not simple being the supervisor in the Holy Church either. To count the time, within 30 minutes after Kayneth canceled the bounded field, all the cover-up tasks had been completed.

Now the entirety of the truth lies solely in the memories of those few who had been present. One of those people was Kayneth, Servant Lancer--heroic spirit Diarmuid ua Duibhne's Master.

The beginning of the long-awaited Heaven's Feel. And the thoroughly prepared-for first battle. Although the results are different from his expectations.

Even in his youth, Kayneth Archibald had appeared to be more outstanding than other kids. No matter what the problem is, nobody could find a better solution than Kayneth's; an opponent who can win against him in a competition is non-existent.

Yet his effort had not surpassed the normal sense of purpose. Simply believing that his research results would be better than someone else's at some place, some time. That was all.

Because of that, Kayneth had already been seen as a 'prodigy' by others in his youth.

This fact is known by everyone. Nobody had any doubts about his title of 'prodigy', and nothing had ever threatened his position as 'prodigy'. So, there was no need for him to be proud or egotistic, he simply enjoyed his deserved title as 'prodigy'.

He has never been in a tight spot, nor has he been extremely frustrated. In the world of the young Kayneth, he was the master of everything. There isn't a need to doubt this in the slightest. He was a talented magus prodigy. He was also the heir of the well-known Archibald family. Not only did he inherit the magic crest passed down through the generations, he himself possessed talent rarely witnessed in this world. All of these 'facts' made all the honors received by Kayneth seem matter of fact. So as to believing that there's nothing in this world Kayneth cannot achieve with his power, this kind of self-confidence is not unfounded. This is not a mistake of Kayneth himself, but the common knowledge of all those around him.

Even in the busy Clock Tower amongst the numerous, successful researchers, his crowning to the famous title Lord El-Melloi by a huge lead had made everyone nod approvingly. But to Kayneth who has become used

to being called 'prodigy', to him who's always been the target of admiration and jealousy, Kayneth did not feel the slightest feeling of satisfaction or accomplishment. All of this is merely life's 'inevitable result' to him.

The past was like that, and the future will definitely be like that. This is a sacred and inviolable 'agreement of life'; to Kayneth there is no doubt about that.

Because of that, too he who can already predict the entire world-- if a very rare, to the point of impossible, 'accident' occurred, then that is the chaos Kayneth absolutely cannot tolerate; it is an insult and blasphemy to God's order.

Such as—

The Servant, Saber, who had clearly been caught in his palm, escaping so very easily. Such an unspeakable inconceivability.

"Lancer, come."

"—Yes, awaiting orders."

As soon as the words left his mouth, the handsome Heroic Sprit appeared obediently and respectfully in front of Kayneth, stooped in a bow. To Kayneth who is the main lecturer on spirit conjuring, speaking directly with the spiritual form poses no trouble, and is in fact very familiar. But a conversation like this face-to-face is very rare.

At least, if his Servant is face to face with him, Kayneth can observe the most minute changes in his expression while conversing with him. As for calling this type of activity a conversation-- it might be more fitting to call it an interrogation instead.

"Thanks for your hard work tonight. I was able to witness very well the might of Diarmuid ua Duibhne's twin spears."

"Thank you, Master."

Lancer replied simply and frankly. He did not feel proud upon hearing the compliment, nor did he show telltale signs of happiness, nor did he seem dissatisfied. He only accepted it with the stringent humility of a knight.

But to the eyes of Kayneth, this definitely was not Lancer's normal expression-- he's hiding something.

"Ah, please answer my question honestly. ... You, what do you plan on doing?"

"... You, what do you mean?"

Even faced with Kayneth's sudden question with an air of interrogation, Lancer still kept his very cautious attitude.

"Lancer, you swore to me as a Servant. To do everything in your power to help me attain victory in the Heaven's Feel. Right?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"Then why are you not serious about this?"

Even being scolded so by Kayneth, Lancer did not show the faintest expressions of anger or guilt, he only kept his head lowered with a serious face. Perhaps he had long been prepared for this interrogation.

"... I only did it for the Knight's honor. Not for viewing the battle as a game."

"Oh? Not admitting it?"

Kayneth made a disdainful grunting sound, then continued the questions.

"Then, let me ask you, why did you let Saber go?"

"That's because--"

"You had the overwhelming advantage more than once, but both times you did not strike; do you really want me to control you with a Command Mantra?"

"..."

Lancer had no response this time, he only held his silence.

"I'll say it again. I witnessed all of tonight's battle. Only thus am I able to ask these questions. Lancer, do you feel that battles are 'fun'?"

Looking at the silent knight with his head lowered, Kayneth sneered and continued.

"Are you that happy? To fight with Saber. To the point of not being able to bring yourself to finish her off?"

To a bystander, they might praise Lancer's bravery and finesse in battle. But from the Master, Kayneth's point of view, bravery and finesse without any results-- this enrages him.

The original relic prepared to summon his preferred heroic spirit Alexander had been stolen by his ungrateful student, Waver Velvet. But this Waver's power does not match at all with that of Alexander's, in the end being unable to control his own Servant and causing Alexander to go on a rampage. Because of Waver's uselessness, the situation then descended into a chaotic status, destroying Kayneth's Lancer's chance at victory... Kayneth has never had so much bad luck. And the cause of all of this is Waver alone but being angry at a person not in front of him is pointless. He can only store this anger inside of him, waiting for his time to face Waver in battle when he could dispel all this anger at him. Regarding this sort of 'external anger', Kayneth is very realistic, calm, and brutal.

But, conversely, Kayneth has no method of controlling his 'internal anger'. To Kayneth who has led a life of being admired, who has never had any contact with defeat his entire life, whether himself or a subordinate, anything that does not meet his expectations-- even if only a little bit-- is definitely not allowed. For he who has been successful all his life, who has never faced any setbacks, is very weak against defeat.

So, to Kayneth, right now, between the enemy Waver who obstructed his obtaining of victory and Lancer who was unable to bring him victory, the latter enrages him more.

"...I'm honestly very sorry. Master."

Noticing Kayneth's anger, Lancer bowed his head deeply and apologized in a serious tone.

"I swear on my reputation as a knight; I will bring you Saber's head. Please believe me, no matter what."

"There's no need to swear to me again! That is only the natural result!"

Kayneth, who had gradually become excited, used an angry voice to suppress Lancer's apologies.

"You already swore to me. That you would bring me, Kayneth El-Melloi, the Holy Grail! In other words, you will destroy the six other Servants; they mean to do the same thing. This is the entire battle's premise.

But what you are saying now… is that oath aimed at victory against Saber alone? This falls far short of the agreement at the start. What's wrong with you?"

"-- I think you're the one that has something wrong with him, Kayneth El-Melloi."

It's neither Lancer nor Kayneth, but the voice of a third person. Nobody knows when the woman who emerged from the bedroom had begun to hear the Servant and master's conversation.

Although sporting red hair like burning flame, she gives off the feeling of an extraordinarily cold, icy beauty. She looks to be a bit younger than Kayneth, a high-class lady perhaps only around twenty years of age. One can tell at a glance that she's a sentimental and prestigious aristocrat. And the temperamental authority emanating from her severe eyes make her seem like an empress.

Her eyes that look as if they are scolding a subordinate are looking at only one person-- Kayneth.

"Lancer has done very well. It's you who are misjudging the situation."

"Sola, what are you saying…"

Considering Kayneth's personality, his not exploding in anger at this point is unfathomable. But this is all because that this woman is a very special being to him.

Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri. Kayneth's teacher-- the department head of the Department of Eulyphis's daughter. She is also the goddess of victory that will complete Kayneth's glory-- that is to say, she is Kayneth's fiancée.

The marriage of the two renowned families Archibald and Sophia-Ri, the union of the prodigy and the department head's daughter, this was a popular topic in the Clock Tower. Although Sophia-Ri's family crest has been passed on to the first son, so Sola doesn't have too high of a place as a magus.

But through her veins flows the ancestral magus blood of the Sophia-Ris. The union between Sola, who has magic circuits many magnitudes above the average person, and the 'prodigy' Kayneth will definitely bring about an even more excellent next generation.

But-- the glorious future seen by the bystanders may not necessarily be that happy for the people involved.

Sola who's glaring at her fiancé and Kayneth who has a horrible expression because he feels humiliated-- no matter how you look at it, those two do not give off a feeling of harmonious love.

"Kayneth, if you ask me, in that situation Lancer's decision was correct. In order to contend with Berserker, he had no choice but to team up with Saber."

Although she hadn't been present to watch the battle on the warehouse street, Sola had used her own familiar to report everything that happened there. Not for the sake of entertainment. Although she has no magic crest, she's still a member of the Sophia-Ris and thus had been nurtured in the ways of magecraft since youth. Regarding a battle between magi such as the Heaven's Feel, her own knowledge is not any less than a Master such as Kayneth.

No, it's rather that from her point of view regarding the battle, the actions of Kayneth as a Master were decidedly lacking.

"Lancer's Gáe Dearg is a very effective noble phantasm against Berserker. Coupled with Saber's aid, it would be a simple matter to defeat that black Servant. This is a very good opportunity to destroy the enemy."

"... That is because you don't know how terrifying Saber is."

Kayneth, who was grinding his teeth because he could not vent his anger, rebutted in a hoarse voice.

Although Kayneth's fiancée has a very sharp eye for analysis, in the end Sola is not his master and not his commander. As Master, Kayneth had been determined to fight by relying on his own decisions since the start. Also, as a man being scolded by his own fiancée, Kayneth's dignity was hurt even more.

"I used the ability of the Master's Perspective to understand Saber's ability. She is a very strong Servant. Her comprehensive ability completely overrides Diarmuid's. A very good opportunity to defeat her was lost!"

"You... do you really understand the specialty of your Servant?"

Sola made a cold, nasal grunt towards the stubborn Kayneth as she said this.

"Do you think Gáe Buidhe is only for looking good? In comparison to Saber who has already received incurably critical damage, wouldn't Berserker, whose identity is unknown, be more of a threat?"

"..."

Although he wanted to argue more, Kayneth could not say even a word of rebuttal.

Towards Sola's offensive manner, Kayneth became reluctantly intimidated.

"Firstly, if you really consider Saber very dangerous--"

During Kayneth's silence, Sola continued on.

"Then why did you leave Saber's Master? That completely defenseless Einzbern woman standing to the side. When Lancer occupied Saber's attention and they were in the midst of battle, why did you not attack the opposing Master? But what you did instead was... hide on the sidelines and watch until the end? You're the one who's in the wrong."

Watching Sola sigh deeply, Kayneth felt as if he was burning with anger at this humiliation, but still he could only watch her in silence, not saying a word.

If it was any other person, Kayneth would've put an end to this humiliation long ago. Even if he had to put the title of Lord El-Melloi on the line, he would have definitely inflicted many times the humiliation back at the person.

But there's only one person in this world, only Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri, who is the exception to this.

Not only because she's the daughter of Kayneth's teacher, but also because she's Kayneth's fiancée; his marriage with her would bring Kayneth even more honor and prestige and the future he's always been pursuing.

This proud as a gem, intelligent lady is the only woman Kayneth, as a man, loves in the entire world.

The first time they met, even before exchanging a single word, Kayneth's heart had already been captured by this woman.

Perhaps noticing Kayneth's depression, Sola's tone relented a bit and she continued on with less derision:

"Kayneth. Compared to other Masters, do you know where your advantage lies? That's you yourself."

"That-- obviously--"

"Adding your own designs onto the original contract system, you really are a prodigy. You deserve being called the greatest prodigy in Euglyphids."

Even though Kayneth was completely sick of hearing words of compliment, he wouldn't mind hearing these words come out of Sola's mouth no matter how many times she says them.

But in fact, Sola's opinion of him was not solely flattery. The secret technique Kayneth prepared for this Heaven's Feel had completely overwritten the rules of the war that had been designated by the 'three original families'.

Originally, there is a cause and effect line between Servant and Master. A technique to separate the right of Command Mantras and the right of supplying prana, letting two separate summoners control one each... by way of Kayneth's prodigious ability, this impossible technique was made possible.

Kayneth is the magus who owns the Command Mantras, yet the one to supply the Servant with prana is none other than... Sola. They can be said to be a two-person team Master.

"-- But, Kayneth, although you are first-rate as a magus, as a soldier you are merely second-rate. Going through all that trouble to complete your preparations, but on the battlefield, you were unable to make proper use of them, right?"

"No, I..."

"Hey, why do you think I supply prana for Lancer? This is originally what you should be responsible for, so why should I commit to it? Isn't this for the sake of your battles going well, for the sake of letting you attain victory in Heaven's Feel? Compared to those masters who have to supply prana to their Servants, you already have a crushing advantage. You can fully utilize your prana to execute various actions."

"But... the wars just started, it's better to be cautious..."

"Oh, really? Then why do you demand results so hastily from Lancer?"

"..."

Although Sola's tone is softer than it was at the start, there is still the implicit meaning outside her words mocking Kayneth's cowardice. Kayneth's expression became even worse.

"So, before you blame Lancer, you should first do some self-reflection. Kayneth, tonight you--"

"Sola-Sama, please stop here."

A sudden, low-toned voice interrupted Sola.

It's Lancer. It's unknown when he raised his head, looking straight at Sola.

"If you continue to humiliate my Master, then as a knight I cannot tolerate it any longer."

"No, that wasn't my intent... I apologize. I crossed the line."

Sola, who up until a moment ago had the dignity of an empress, apologized and lowered her eyes as if in shame after one sentence from Lancer. No matter who looks at this transformation, it's way too sudden.

In Kayneth's heart, the scene before him left a very negative impact. Sola has always nagged at him incessantly and has never listened to him even once. He, who is to become her husband soon. Sola, who is to become his wife soon. Why do the words of a Servant have more weight than those of her future husband?

And since the start, Sola had been arguing with him to protect Lancer. Perhaps she could not stand watching Lancer being scolded?

Kayneth watched Sola's eyes, which were fixated on Lancer, and saw some emotion in his fiancée’s eyes that he has never before witnessed before. And then he shifted his eyes towards Lancer--

The scintillating mole under Lancer's left eye caught his attention. Is that the fabled "tear mole" of Diarmuid ua Duibhne that attracted females?

No, baseless suspicion is stupid. Even a commoner would know that Sola was the daughter of the renowned Sophia-Ri family. Even though she does not possess a magic crest, she still has very strong resistance against this type of charm spell.

Unless, she herself does not willingly resist this type of charm, then--

Just as Kayneth was lost in thought, the fire alarm went off without warning, interrupting his train of thought.

"...What? What's happening?"

Sola mumbled confusedly, and at the same time the telephone in the room began to ring. The call display shows that it's from the lobby.

Kayneth calmly lifted up the receiver to listen to the receptionist. When he finished, Kayneth's gaze once again regained the sharpness unique to magi.

"It seems like there's a fire somewhere downstairs; the management is telling us to evacuate."

Kayneth said to Sola as he hung up the phone.

"Although the fire is not too severe, the places that caught fire are very scattered. It looks like arson."

"Arson? Tonight?"

"Yeah, I think it's definitely not coincidental."

Kayneth made a disdainful sound. The restlessness and worries that had been in his heart earlier quickly disappeared completely.

"This is a plan to disperse the crowd. The opponent must be a magus. Looks like he doesn't want to do battle in a building with too many bystanders."

Sola speaks with a tense expression.

"Then-- an ambush?"

"I'm afraid so. It might be that guy from the warehouse street who wants to play some more.

Interesting. That's exactly what we want, right Lancer?"

"Yes, exactly."

Lancer nodded definitively, as if preparing to battle with the enemy. Out of all seven Masters, there is only one person who would be in such a rush to attack Kayneth-- that is the Master of Saber, whose Servant had been hit by Gáe Buidhe. He must want to dispel this curse as soon as possible.

"Lancer, go to the floor below to meet them. But don't disperse them too quickly."

At Kayneth's hidden intents within the words, Lancer only nodded:

"Understood. Cut off the attackers' path of retreat, then chase them here, is that it?"

"Yes. Since we have visitors, then why not let them take a good look at Kayneth El-Melloi's magic atelier?"

This hotel, as Kayneth's stronghold, must have undergone complete renovation. Not the material type of renovation, but a fortification through magecraft. In this building totaling thirty-two floors, Kayneth's bounded field covers twenty-four floors. This place can be called a castle of magecraft. In addition, there are three magical furnaces for Kayneth's exclusive use, and in place of hounds there have been summoned ten-odd evil spirits and apparitions. There isn't even a flaw in the drainage pipes; Kayneth completely covered the area underneath the hall with his bounded field.

Instead of attacking enemy territory, it's much better to perfect one's own territory. As for the challenger who dares set foot in here, Kayneth will make him realize the real terror of Lord El-Melloi.

"Since all the other customers are already gone, there won't be anything to worry about. You can both use your full power to fight."

The irrepressible sound of laughter spilled out from Kayneth's throat. And the knight who had not been able to stop trembling in excitement also rushed out.

To Kayneth right now, the only thing that is needed is action. Only action and results can dispel the humiliation inflicted upon him by Sola. Right now, the only thing to do is to make full use of his own potential, that which had made others call him a prodigy, to prove his capabilities.

Yes, Kayneth right now desires blood. The dark anger that has been bottled up inside him must be offset by somebody's blood. The unfortunate enemy who coincidentally showed up to attack right now is about to become the perfect offering.

"You said I was a second rate-soldier; I'm about to make you take those words back. Sola."

"Okay. I'll be waiting."

Kayneth's fiancée who's usually always criticizing him, only at this moment did she watch him with a smiling face. Kayneth's fighting spirit heightened even more--

The fear and drowsiness of the customers, who had been awakened by the fire alarm in the midst of their dreams and herded outside to the parking lot, combined with the cold outside, caused them to wear difficult expressions. Amidst these people, the employees of the hotel scurried about busily.

"...Mr. Archibald! Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald! Are you here?"

Of all the names recorded on the customer list, there is only one person whose presence has not been confirmed; the bellhop called him in a frantic voice. Everyone regarded this largesse customer who had reserved the entire top floor of the hotel very highly. On some level, this is the person they least want to be in danger.

"Mr. Archibald! Are you here?"

"-- I am here. Do not worry."

A resonant voice came from behind the bellhop, but as the bellhop turned around, he became confused. The person speaking to him was a Japanese male wearing an old-styled coat.

This kind of joke is too much. The angry bellhop was about to yell at him-- but he was captivated by the man's eyes.

That man's eyes held an indescribable, mysterious force of attraction; the bellhop was unable to avoid his eyes and was not able to even speak.

"I am Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald. My wife Sola is with me."

This unknown Japanese male stated in a clear voice. And the bellhop accepted this without any suspicion as if hypnotized.

"...Is that so? Ah, yes. That's it."

After the bellhop checked off a spot on the 'escaped' section of his list, finally confirming that all the customers were safe, he exhaled a long breath. All of his suspicions while speaking to Archibald earlier and his feelings that something was wrong had disappeared without a trace.

Watching the employee continue on to tend to other customers, Emiya Kiritsugu left the chaotic crowd. His earlier hypnotic suggestion, to a commoner with no magic resistance whatsoever, would not be broken in a short period of time.

After walking to a shady, dark area some distance away from the hotel, Kiritsugu pulled out the cellphone in his pocket as he scanned the surroundings to ensure no one was watching him. Cellphones were very common amongst the people and has given Kiritsugu great help. It is a simple yet useful wireless apparatus for communication and holding it will not draw any suspicion from anyone.

First, he has to contact Maiya, who was positioned for surveillance.

"Everything set on your end?"

"No irregularities. Ready."

Maiya's position is a tall building still under construction diagonally across Fuyuki's Hyatt hotel. From there it's possible to clearly see Kayneth's room, that was the position Kiritsugu designated.

Kiritsugu sighed lightly, reaching for his cigarette box with one hand, dialing a set of numbers on the cellphone with the other.

Kiritsugu dialed an empty number. But there was no response whatsoever from his cellphone. The modified communication loops were connecting not to an analog signal, but to the trigger of a C4 bomb.

The bomb only caused a very small explosion, to the point where the sound of the explosion cannot even be heard outside the hotel.

But what resounded in the night was the horrifying sound of reinforced concrete splintering and collapsing.

The evacuees who had noticed something was wrong saw the sudden change in the towering building and began to shout in panic.

"The hotel, the hotel is collapsing!"

The hotel, towering at a hundred and fifty some meters in height, kept its upright posture but collapsed as if being sucked into the ground. Because all the outside walls collapsed inward, not a shard of debris flew outward and only the dust created by the collapse spread towards the surrounding streets. Precision blasting-- a highly advanced blasting technique used primarily to demolish tall buildings. Due to the destruction of load bearing walls and key support structures, the building collapses downward and inward on its own weight. Using the least number of explosives to obtain the result of total destruction. To Emiya Kiritsugu who's familiar with all blasting techniques from past to present, there's a very special appreciation for this type of art of destruction.

All of the buildings acting as the bases of magi in Fuyuki City are listed on Emiya Kiritsugu's destruction list. And Fuyuki's Hyatt hotel is one of the list's entries. Kiritsugu obtained the building's blueprints beforehand and determined the points at which to place explosives. As long as the preparations are all complete, the actual execution requires less than an hour.

Although the evacuees were already as far as possible from the collapsing building and outside the range of flying debris, they were showered with the dust sent flying by the collapse and mired into a state of panic. While watching the disturbance in the crowd, Kiritsugu looked for a gap with weaker wind and lit the cigarette in his hand.

"Maiya, how are things on your end?"

"Up until the end there was no activity on the thirty-second floor. The target has not escaped from the building."

In other words-- Kiritsugu thought with some satisfaction as he looked at the ashes of the ruins of Fuyuki's Hyatt hotel-- the one called 'Lord El-Melloi' Kayneth-Sama is now most certainly keeping the rubble company.

The thirty-second floor that Kayneth was on, due to the chain reaction caused by the precision blasting, had lost its support and practically freefallen a hundred and fifty meters to the ground. No matter how well it is defended by a bounded field, in the face of such destructive force it probably cannot protect the people inside the rooms.

Suddenly there came the sound of a child crying and Kiritsugu's attention was stolen from the ruins.

The child's mother walked past Kiritsugu holding a child who would not stop crying due to fear. Both were wearing only pajamas and covered head to toe with white ash, appearing so miserable it was hard to watch.

Kiritsugu kept watching the backs of the parent and child... up until his hand was burned by the burning tip of the cigarette, when he snapped back to attention. Kiritsugu tossed the mostly-burnt-up cigarette to the floor and stamped it out with his foot.

Emiya Kiritsugu felt a little confused; sentimentality is definitely unacceptable for him. These kinds of weak feelings would directly threaten his life. But, regarding his failure, he cannot face it with a composed attitude no matter what.

Yes. Even if he did not want to admit it, the reality was this—Kiritsugu saw the figures of Irisviel and Ilyasviel in the receding figures of the parent and child.

Emiya Kiritsugu once believed that there was no differentiation in sacrifice. All life was equal, so choosing the path that led to a smaller sacrifice was okay. In this manner of judgment, the lives of women and children do not receive any special treatment.

The Holy Grail could be used to save the world. And Kayneth is a target that must be eliminated in order to obtain the Holy Grail. There are a thousand-some people in the Fuyuki Hyatt hotel, but the Holy Grail could save at least five billion people. Kiritsugu could completely eradicate these tenants along with Kayneth if there was the necessity to do so.

Then why did he need to set a fire beforehand to cause this disturbance?

In the beginning, he thought that this had been the obvious tactic. Kayneth specifically set many traps in order to defend against an ambush; as for the tactic against his strategic defense, this one has definitely yielded effective results. That prodigy magus held his iron wall as his pride, but he never thought that the entire castle would be destroyed so he remained inside.

But, was his real intent really just limited to this?

His sentimental hope that the innocent tenants would escape in time, is it really showing just now unconsciously?

This really is a fatal romanticism. If he was on the battlefield, this sort of sentiment would definitely lead to his death.

To steady the shaky feelings in his heart, Kiritsugu once again lit a cigarette.

He's degraded. Although he doesn't know how much weaker he is, the Emiya Kiritsugu today has definitely degraded from the one nine years ago. If this continued, then he might not be able to successfully obtain victory in the Holy Grail War. No matter what, not restoring the cold manner of judgment from before is unacceptable-- the faster the better.

The neighborhood disturbed by the late-night incident has at last begun to stir. Watching the crowd gather in the street, Kiritsugu inhaled deeply and took out his cellphone to give Maiya the signal to retreat.

The sound that reached his ears was not the voice of his subordinate, but the roar of two metallic entities colliding.

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The not yet named metallic lookout. Nearing its completion, it's temporarily called the Fuyuki shopping center's thirty-eighth floor.

The construction is already more than half done, only the exterior left incomplete. This high-rise building will soon become a shopping center and the symbol of Fuyuki Shinto, but right now it is only an empty skeleton of reinforced concrete, buffeted by the strong gales of the night.

Whether it is the streetlights on the ground or the stars in the sky, everything seems distant and bleak. It is in this void that Hisau Maiya knelt, unmoving, supporting on her shoulder the AUG assault rifle that had night vision equipped. The muzzle was propped on her upright left knee.

If magus Kayneth noticed Kiritsugu's plan and escaped from the window, Hisau Maiya who was waiting here would ambush him. But the result is that this preparation had been completely unnecessary.

"Maiya, what's the situation there?"

From Hisau Maiya's earphones came the questioning voice of Kiritsugu on ground level. Having needed both hands to support her rifle, Maiya switched the cellphone to earphone mode to free her hands.

"Up until the end there was no activity on the thirty-second floor. The target has not escaped from the hotel."

Maiya spoke into the microphone beside her mouth and gave Kiritsugu a brief summary of her surveillance. Although she has just witnessed a devastating destruction, her voice did not contain even a bit of excitement.

Her surveillance mission here is over. Maiya retrieved the bullets, which had not had a chance to be of use before the mission was over, from the gun, put them into a case, and then slung the assault rifle over her shoulder and stood up to head for the stairs.

At that moment, she noticed a trace of abnormality.

Not a typical abnormality, but a hard-to-detect subtle change of atmosphere. To an experienced soldier, it is an easy matter to clearly detect this kind of killing intent.

"-- Your senses are sharp, miss."

From behind the now still Maiya came a low, cold male voice. The voice echoed in the empty building of reinforced concrete, making it impossible to determine from whence it came.

Maiya did not respond or ask questions. She only calmly used her sharp intuition to determine the enemy's location and pulled out the 9mm-caliber handgun from her belt.

As for the other person in this place, the person who discovered Maiya's existence-- no matter who it is, this reason alone is sufficient for him to become Maiya's target.

"-- Hmm, it's also nice to have this kind of preparation."

The man hidden in the shadows said so in a mocking voice.

At that moment, something was tossed at Maiya's feet from the shadow of some pillar.

Maiya immediately aimed her gun at the object and after making sure it was not dangerous, she pointed her gun back towards the place where the object was tossed from. But even so, Maiya still used her peripheral vision to watch the object that was tossed out.

The corpse of a small animal.

A bat. And judging from the CCD camera on the bat's abdomen, this is definitely the bat familiar Maiya sent out. This is the one that was placed by the Fuyuki church that she had lost communication with.

Then, without doubt, the one who deliberately tossed out the corpse of the bat can only be him. And the opponent seems to have no interest in concealing himself any longer. Slowly walking out from behind the pillar where he was hiding, he exposed himself to Maiya's line of sight and line of fire.

The man in front of him seemed filled with authority and pressure, wearing a pitch-black frock. Maiya knows him.

"Kotomine, Kirei..."

"Oh? This should be the first time we've met. So how do you know who I am? Is it perhaps your precognition?"

Maiya, realizing her mistake, regretted it.

Kirei did not show the slightest bit of discomfort at facing Maiya's gun and continued on calmly.

"If that's so, then you should definitely know about a lot of other things too, right? This is a prime location for spying on Fuyuki Hyatt hotel's thirty-second floor; perhaps some very important person lives there?"

This time it was Maiya's turn to be silent. But her mind was filled with suspicion: as a Master... Kotomine Kirei should carefully hide himself, so why would he choose to show up here? What is his real intention?

On the other side, Kirei diverged his sight slightly outwards-- landing on the position where the Fuyuki Hyatt hotel is now a pile of rubble. He stared intently for a while, then heaved a long sigh.

"Even so--was it really necessary to destroy the building too? To use this kind of tactics, can he still be called a magus? Or rather, maybe he shouldn't have been considered a magus to begin with?"

"..."

This man-- Maiya was suddenly surprised-- he knows. He knows all about Emiya Kiritsugu. Just like how Emiya Kiritsugu knows Kotomine Kirei.

"Look at me rambling on and on here, miss. Why don't you say something--where is the man who should be here in your place right now?"

After being asked that, Maiya made a new judgment regarding Kotomine Kirei. This man in front of him must be killed.

The sound of Maiya's rapid fire rang out. Although the 9mm-caliber called the military bullet has a good ability to inflict damage, it is still not powerful enough. So, in order to effectively kill the opponent, the key is to shoot the abdominal region three times consecutively. Compared to the small fatal point that can instantly cause death, attacking the position where it is easy to hit and inflict heavy damage seems more effective. This is the rule of killing by shooting.

Even so, Maiya's bullets did not strike the organs beneath the frock, but rather the hard-concrete floor.

Even if Kotomine Kirei's evasive actions were of an unbelievable speed, they cannot be faster than the speed of sound of the bullets. But he determined

Maiya's thoughts before she pulled the trigger and acted beforehand. What's amazing is Kotomine Kirei's judgment on tactics.

Predicting the moment of Maiya firing, and thus dodging the bullets. Even in the field of thaumaturgy, this is beyond the ability of the average person.

Not only that--

In that instant the person who turned to hide was not Kirei but Maiya. Her right hand was stained with blood, and the handgun that was supposed to be clutched in her hand fell to the ground with a metallic noise. And her surprise-filled eyes stared at the pillar she had been propping her back against. The keen edge that is suddenly sticking out from that pillar glints with a cold light.

The thin blade, longer than a meter, made one think of the weapons used in fencing; as a sword the hilt was very short. This is the projectile weapon used specifically by the executors in the Holy Church, called the "Black Key". Just now, this is what cut the back of Maiya's hand and made her drop her handgun. Kirei had simultaneously thrown this weapon and avoided the bullet.

Although it is a hand-tossed weapon, it had enough power to penetrate reinforced concrete. Even so, it only made Maiya drop her gun and did not contain the intent to take her life. To use such force on purpose, he probably wants to take away the opponent's weapon and at the same time destroy her morale. It's best to capture the other alive-- after all, Maiya had not yet answered Kirei's question.

"Your movements aren't bad. Very sharp."

Kirei, who's holding the position of initiative after completely reversing the situation of attack and defense, spoke and walked over leisurely. And once again a Black Key appeared in his hands. The long blade of the Black Key is a semi-solid formed by prana, so while carrying it just holding the small hilt is sufficient. Nobody knows exactly how many Black Keys are hidden under Kirei's loose frock.

The Black Key, as one of the staple equipment’s of the Holy Church's executors, has great power but is also very difficult to use. Someone who is able to use its power so skillfully must be a very strong expert. And Maiya seems to have encountered such a rare expert now.

Maiya is not a warrior, only a soldier. So, to her there is no combat record worth boasting of, only the analysis of combat. The combat ability of Kotomine Kirei very obviously surpasses her own. In this situation where

she has no equipment or advantageous terrain or tactics, admitting her defeat is wiser.

"What is it, Maiya? What happened?"

Kiritsugu's voice sounded in the earphones. It seems like the cellphone in her pocket is still keeping her in contact with Kiritsugu. But-- Maiya now cannot respond. He can hear Maiya's voice. That horrifying executor's real goal is not Maiya but Kiritsugu. Kirei's judgment that Maiya was Kiritsugu's subordinate, carrying out every action based on Kiritsugu's instructions, was verified completely here.

"What's wrong? Not calling for help. Emiya Kiritsugu is nearby, right?"

Kirei no longer had a bit of doubt left when he said this name, because he is convinced that his judgment is correct. If Kiritsugu wants the Holy Grail, then he would definitely act tonight.

The effect of the curse of Diarmuid's Gáe Buidhe is easy to see. They have been mired into a very unfavorable situation with one of Saber's arms sealed off while the six remaining Servants are still in good condition. To the Einzbern camp, the most pressing matter is to eliminate the origin of the curse, Lancer, as soon as possible.

So Kirei set up his net near Kayneth's dwelling, calmly awaiting the arrival of the ambushers.

But in the end, he found not Emiya Kiritsugu but someone else. Yet Kotomine Kirei is certain that this person is acting based on Kiritsugu's instructions. So, this woman he is facing right now is definitely the key to finding Emiya Kiritsugu.

He can't kill her; it's best to capture her alive. As long as he can make her talk, it's fine.

Even if he had to break her arms and legs.

After making a cruel judgment in his heart, Kotomine Kirei approached the woman's hiding place slowly. The opponent should be unarmed. The already disassembled assault rifle cannot be reassembled quick enough, and the dropped pistol is far away. This match has already been decided.

But what stopped Kotomine Kirei was an impediment beyond his expectations.

Suddenly a veil of white smoke appeared between him and the prey, completely obscuring his vision, and with it an irritating smell of chemical reactions rushed into his nostrils.

"Smokescreen!?"

What suddenly appeared in front of Kotomine Kirei was a smokescreen released by a military-use smoke dispersion bomb.

And in that instant when Kirei's sight was obscured by the smokescreen, Maiya escaped with haste.

Although Kotomine Kirei tossed a Black Key in the direction of the noise, he did not hit the target. The instinct of an executor who's been through countless battles told him that he could not move carelessly in the current predicament.

Kotomine Kirei held Black Keys in both hands, not daring to let his guard down the slightest, and surveyed his surroundings while waiting for the smoke to disperse. In this building exposed to strong winds, the thick smoke only took several seconds to dissipate-- but that woman managed to escape in these mere seconds.

Only he was left. Realizing he was the only person left in this empty building, Kirei grunted and put away his Black Keys. He did not have any intention of pursuit.

Kirei picked up the smoke dispersion bomb, now empty of all smoke, from the ground and began to inspect it. It's an American grenade model. There isn't anything special about it; it's simply something that anyone can get if they had the right connections.

It wasn't tossed by that woman, because if he had found that she had moved in the slightest then he would've thrown a Black Key to stop her. This had been tossed in front of him by someone else to help that woman escape.

Of course, there shouldn't be anyone else inside this building. If that's the case, then the smoke grenade should have been tossed in from outside the building.

Kirei walked to the edge of the building-- ignoring the wind tugging at his frock-- and looked down.

Around the rubble of the former Fuyuki Hyatt hotel, there aren't any buildings that can stand shoulder to shoulder with this one. The distance from ground level to this position is at least a hundred and fifty meters. It'd

be hard to aim at this position precisely even with a long-range weapon. Not to mention a hand tossed smoke grenade. It's a cosmic farce for someone to toss that up from ground level.

But Kirei was, after all, an executor who has hunted many strange magi before. He was already thoroughly used to facing enemies who were beyond common sense. To him, this level of strangeness didn't have anything that was worth being surprised over.

Somewhere below him existed the magus who stopped him.

As long as this was confirmed, then he has gained something tonight.

At the same time, Kirei felt the breath of the strange form concealed beside him.

"Assassin?"

"Yes, it is me."

Assassin, who was sporting a long pitch-black gown, materialized kneeling in front of Kirei. This Assassin is one among the three who were spying on Irisviel and Saber in the forest, who had been charged to bring over the obtained information.

"Didn't I tell you not to materialize indoors?"

"I'm terribly sorry, but I have a very urgent report to make..."

-144:09:25

After a night of continuous deadly fights, a streak of white light gradually appeared at the eastern sky. At this moment Kirei was using the magical communicator to establish a connection with the Tōsaka mansion in the Miyami district. He and his father Kotomine Risei were preparing to call for an emergency strategy meeting.

“Huh? Can we really trace Caster’s trail immediately now?”

Tokiomi’s satisfaction and praise were revealed through his voice. Kirei and Assassin’s efforts had finally yielded the results he wanted. Although his

servant was still a tricky problem, his apprentice's side had progressed very smoothly.

"Our opponent is really the Heroic Spirit of a magus. Despite being an Assassin, it was still tough for him to enter their workshop unnoticed. But now we are sure of the approximate position of the enemy. Currently Assassin is carrying out close surveillance at the perimeter of the area. Once Caster appears out of his workshop, his activities can be known immediately."

"Which is to say that Caster did not stay within his workshop, and is actively operating outside?"

"Yes. That's because……"

Recalling Tokiomi's reaction when he delivered the report last time, Kirei hesitated slightly. Caster and his master's actions might give rise to grave consequences.

"…Both of them went to the city beside Miyami town and captured the sleeping children back to their workshop. Until daylight appears, they had caught 15 of them. Though most operations were carried out smoothly, the parents of 3 children discovered them and a struggle ensued. Eventually, the two killed the entire family."

Able to clearly feel Tokiomi's fury, Kirei continued promptly before he manages to reply.

"Caster uses magecraft unhesitatingly, and he does not even clean and tidy up the place after it. Now, under my father's instructions, workers from the Holy Church are clearing the traces they left behind at the scene. However, I'm afraid that even after today, Caster and his master's behavior will not change in any way."

"……What on earth are they thinking! What type of person is that jerk? The Master of that Caster."

"According to Assassin who eavesdropped their conversations, before summoning Caster, that Master had already been carrying out similar murders like this. Though we can't be sure yet, this guy is apparently the same person as the wanted serial killer."

"……"

Tokiomi breathed heavily in anger.

Since this month, news of the mysterious serial killer- ‘The Demon of Fuyuki City’, had been continuously reported. Using brutal methods rarely seen within these few years, he was related to 4 murder incidents in the city. Worst still, in the last case, it was said that he had killed all the family members in their sleep - an extremely savage killer. The police of Fuyuki city had set up a special task force which had gathered the police force from the neighboring vicinity to crack the case quickly. Nevertheless, there had been no progress at all; they were still at the stage where they cannot even determine the facial features of the suspect.

For Tokiomi, for such a serious thing to happen during Heaven’s Feel was indeed a headache. This should be the same for all Masters. The Heaven’s Feel must be carried out in secret. This is a solemn rule for all contestants. Someone who drew so much attention to this place would not be welcomed.

Actually, all the magi were responsible to guard the noble creed. Whoever he is, nobody would expose magecraft to the common people. Everyone researched their magecraft underground; those who failed to guard this secret would be put to death promptly by the Association. As long as something is related to the secrecy of magecraft, the Magus Association was firm and thorough in managing it. That is why this matter always made the magi’s blood run cold.

Let say there was a magus who appear at the headlines of the community news almost daily; and that this Master is his Servant’s puppet- this had to be a critically alarming situation.

“About these two, did you obtain any detailed information, reports, or something like that?”

“From how they call each other, we can gather that the master’s name is ‘Ryuunosuke’, while Caster is known as ‘Bluebeard’.”

“Bluebeard? Then Caster’s real identity has to be Count Gilles de Rais, isn’t it?”

“Possible. This person was very famous in alchemy and black magic."

From the point of view of his fame as a legend, it is not surprising that he is summoned by the Holy Grail as a Servant. It's just that his characteristics are totally different from a Heroic Spirit. It is more fitting for him to be known as ‘vengeful spirit’ instead.

“From their conversations, as a Master, Ryuunosuke does not have any prior knowledge about Heaven’s Feel. Putting that aside, he doesn’t even have the self-consciousness of a magus.”

“This is quite possible. Under accidental situations, it is possible for someone without any magecraft teaching to make a contract with the summoned Servant… That Master will be the Servant’s puppet.”

“But that is...”

Recalling what he had heard through Assassin’s ears, Kirei continued:

“…No matter what, Caster’s words and actions are beyond the boundary of normal comprehensions. He keeps saying things like the Holy Grail is already his; must rescue Jeanne d’Arc - things that do not make sense at all.”

As if trying to vent out all the anger in his heart in a single breath, Tokiomi let out a deep sigh.

“A Servant that is rampaging around due to his mental disturbance and a Master who is totally helpless at the situation? Why on earth did the Holy Grail choose such jerks?”

Servants attacking human beings- this itself is nothing abnormal. For spiritual beings who feed on prana to exist, Servants do not just acquire prana restoration from their Masters. They can also procure energy by absorbing the spirit of human beings. Masters who are incapable of providing sufficient prana to their Servants may use sacrificial ceremonies to make up for the inadequate prana.

Even in this Heaven’s Feel, cases like offering sacrifices were still within Tokiomi’s expectations. This is something without blame. Magi themselves are already existences beyond common rules. They can ignore morality and usual perception of right and wrong. If they have to sacrifice innocent people, as long as it is covertly and secretly done, silent approval is given.

But reckless murders like this which create such a huge commotion - this behavior is never allowed.

“You cannot let this matter run wild, right? Tokiomi-kun.”

With a displeased look, Father Risei cut in.

“Caster and his master’s actions have clearly obstructed the progress of the Heaven’s Feel. This is against the rules.”

“Of course. As someone whose former job was to guard the secrecy of magecraft, I will not let them off.”

For generations, the Tōsaka family had always been the secret guardian of the area of Fuyuki city. Managing the laylines of this land and monitoring any abnormal occurrence here - this is the responsibility entrusted to them by the Magus Association. This is also the reason, as one of the ‘three initiate families’, the Tōsakas offered this place under their watch as the stage for the Heaven’s Feel.

As a Master whose goal is to acquire the Holy Grail and also as the guardian of this land, Tokiomi really has to stop Caster’s actions.

“I’m afraid they are also behind the continual disappearances of the children after the 4 murder cases.”

Kirei reported his views dryly.

“There only 17 children reported missing. If we take the situation of this morning’s surveillance into account, and if we include the extra ones they captured, the number of missing children will be at least 30. Their actions will only intensify, I’m afraid. Father, we have to stop them as soon as possible.”

“Yeah. It is already beyond the extent where warnings and punishments are effective. The only way left is to destroy Caster and his Master.”

“But the problem is that to fight a Servant, we have to rely on a fellow Servant. However, my Assassin cannot take any action.”

Kirei’s remarks really made sense. Assassin’s purpose was to specifically carry out clandestine plans, and how can he be allowed to show up again so quickly?

Father Risei contemplated this in silence for a while. To Tokiomi, he suggested:

“It is within my jurisdiction as a supervisor to alter the rules slightly. What if we put the struggle for the Holy Grail aside first? We muster all the other master’s to go against Caster. How about it?”

“Huh? Then……what do you have in mind, Father?”

“I can provide certain help which would assist the one who manage to eradicate Caster’s Master, in their future battles. The result of having the entire Heaven’s Feel disrupted because of Caster’s sole rampage… I doubt the other masters would want it to happen too.”

“……Oh, I see. Change the objective of this game to hunting. Is that right?”

Taking the Servant whose hand was injured in yesterday night’s haphazard fight into consideration, none of the Servants were killed yet. So, if everyone shifts their targets to Caster, his life would be hanging by a thread. Just like a lighted candle in a hurricane, Caster's fate is ready to be extinguished any moment.

“But the condition of awarding benefits to the one who defeats Caster…… Will it backfire on us instead? Will it eventually hinder us from obtaining the Holy Grail?”

Smiling, Father Risei replied.

“Of course, it is not good for someone else to acquire the benefits. But the only one who could deliver the final blow to Caster, cornered by the hounds, would be Archer.”

“……I see. That’s obvious.”

As long as Kirei’s Assassin is present, it will be all too easy to arrange the time accurately so that Archer delivers the finishing blow. Although the rules were altered now, the Tōsaka camp’s battle tactics and skills were still unchanged.

“Then quickly prepare to gather the other Masters.”

After he decided what to do, Father Risei got up and left the underground chamber. Just as Kirei was about to stand up, he was halted by Tokiomi.

“…Oh yes, Kirei-kun. I heard that you left the Fuyuki Church to do something on your own last night.”

Kirei had already anticipated Tokiomi’s question. On the surface, Tokiomi’s apprentice had already been defeated in this Heaven’s Feel and was currently seeking protection from the church. So, he shouldn't be doing anything at all.

“I am very sorry. I know this is very risky too, but I had discovered a spy in the vicinity of the church. So, I had to do something about it-”

“Spy? Is its target you, who’s a part of the Church?”

Tokiomi sounded much stricter.

“Please don’t worry about it. I have already destroyed the spy. No secret will be leaked out,” answered Kirei in a breezy voice.

Kirei surprised even himself at his ease in lying straight at his master's face.

"Why didn't you use your Servant?"

"I feel that this is something trivial. Assassin is not required."

After a moment of silence, Tokiomi commented, slightly unhappily.

"……You really are a highly-skilled Executor, and I also know you have high confidence in your ability. But based on the current situation, aren't you careless in these actions of yours?"

"You're right. I'll tread carefully next time."

Kirei lied again.

From now onwards, Kirei would probably go into the battlefield a few more times to trace Emiya Kiritsugu's trail, until he finds him.

Kirei waited until the communicator was in complete silence before leaving the underground chamber.

Just as Kirei opened the door of his room in the first floor of the house, he sensed a disharmony as if he had just walked into a wrong room.

It was neither the change of scent nor the change in temperature of the room. Overall, he felt a great change in the overall feel of the room. The plain room of his had suddenly emanated a luxurious and elegant feeling as if it is a palace.

There was no difference in the settings and lightings of the room. The only difference was a man who is sitting on the bench in the middle of the room, totally ignorant of everyone else.

This intruder, who took over someone else's room with no reason, is someone that surprised Kirei a little. Startled, Kirei frowned.

"……Archer?"

With golden hair standing upright as if it's burning and a pair of ruby-red eyes, this man in front of him was none other than Tōsaka Tokiomi's Servant, the King of Heroes, Gilgamesh. However, instead of wearing his original golden armor, this Heroic Spirit was donned in a modern match-up of a leather jacket with furs and fashionable leather pants.

Since he was summoned, this Servant had been wondering around carelessly with his ability of Independent Action. But, getting tired of parading himself in his spirit form, Archer decided to dress himself in ‘playing attire’ to take on physical form on a whim while having a stroll in the streets at night. Although he had heard of Archer’s idiotic deeds from Tokiomi, Kirei had never imagined that Archer would appear in his room.

Apparently, Archer was not ashamed at all at intruding other people’s rooms. Putting that aside, he had even casually removed a bottle of red wine from the cupboard and had poured himself a cup. Elegantly, Archer sipped the wine.

“Despite being few in number, compared to Tokiomi’s collection, yours is more high-class. What a presumptuous apprentice.”

“……”

Still in the dark about the reason for Archer’s visit, Kirei looked at the row of empty wine bottles on the table.

Looks like Archer had tasted all Kirei’s hidden wine.

Although it is initially surprising, if one ponders about it, he would find nothing strange. Kirei has this habit that, once he hears of a wine of extraordinary quality, he would purchase it immediately.

The study of wine is actually a deep world without any boundaries if you wish to pursue it. Wine can fill the emptiness of one’s heart through its taste. When you are feeling hollow inside, getting drunk with alcohol is not a bad idea too.

Walking in the cul-de-sac, Kirei thought about these ideas, half-seriously.

Nevertheless, hitherto, he had never tried wine even once. All he did was to increase to number of delicious wines. Kirei did not even think of serving it to his guests.

As for this drunkard who casually drinks others’ hidden wine, no matter how much he praised it, Kirei did not have any welcoming attitude towards him.

“What do you want?”

Facing this blunt question, Archer lifted up his wine glass and gazed meaningfully at Kirei.

“Looks like the ones who are bored aren’t just limited to me alone.”

“Bored?”

Hearing this reply, Kirei realized the meaning behind those words instantly.

Apparently, this heroic spirit had known what transpired last night- Kirei disobeying Tokiomi’s orders to stay put and venturing out alone- although Kirei was not sure since when Archer knew about it.

“What’s wrong, Kirei? Are you also feeling unsatisfied with only obeying Tokiomi’s commands?”

“……So, are you still unhappy with your contract now, Gilgamesh?”

Evading Archer’s question, Kirei asked back in a displeased tone. Although he is the mystical ‘King of Heroes’, Kirei did not see him as someone to be feared. In spite of Tokiomi’s views, a Servant is still a servant. No matter who this Heroic Spirit is, he is still Servant Archer, an existence belonging to Tokiomi. Comparing him to Kirei who is Tokiomi’s apprentice, their status is about the same. There is no need to worry too much about him.

Archer did not mind this attitude of his. He merely snorted and took another sip of wine.

“The one who summoned me here and has been providing me with prana is Tokiomi. So, no matter what, I still have to treat him with servant-like etiquette.”

After this surprising declaration, a sliver of melancholic haze gleamed in Gilgamesh’s red irises.

“But frankly speaking, he is really a boring man, completely devoid of any interesting aspects.”

“……These words should not come from you, a Servant.”

From his astonished heart, Kirei felt a slight surge of anger at Archer’s rude remark towards his master. At the same time, he felt that he had a rough idea as to why Archer came to visit him. In this more relaxed atmosphere, Kirei had slowly accepted the presence of Archer in his room.

“Are they really that mundane? Tokiomi-shi’s orders.”

“Huh… Really meaningless. Wanting to achieve the omnipotent, wish-granting device, ‘Akasha’? What a pointless wish.”

The only thing every magus yearns for even in their dreams; Archer laughed it off just like that. But Kirei was able to empathize with him.

“The craving desire for the ‘root’ is something every magus has. Bystanders would not be able to comprehend it.”

“If that is so, you are one of the bystanders too, Kirei. As far as I know, before this, your position is one which opposes the magi, right?”

Archer had seemingly heard about Kirei’s complicated stand. Although he always wears an air of hauteur, his ability to gather information is amazingly sharp.

Kirei folded his arms, deep in thought. Instead of Tōsaka Tokiomi’s apprentice, if he looks at things from the viewpoint of the representative of the Assembly of the 8th Sacrament, what is the purpose of Tokiomi’s Heaven’s Feel?

“…. The path leading to the ‘root’ can be said to lead to the ‘outside’ of the world. Which is to say, it will not bring any effect to the ‘inside’, which is this world. For the Church, which only focuses on the ‘inside’, the magi’s pursuit is downright pointless. We can only take their action as a meaningless plan.”

“Oh, I see. Looks like I am only interested in things related to this universe, which is also my garden.”

Speaking as if he owns the universe…Having such a haughty attitude really fits his status as the ‘King of Heroes’.

“I am not interested in the territories that cannot be controlled by me. That’s why I don’t care about this ‘root’ thingy at all.”

Kirei smiled bitterly. In other words, this Archer’s stand goes against all the other magi. That is why it is reasonable for Tōsaka Tokiomi, a typical magus, to feel helpless at someone like Archer.

“If the Holy Grail of Fuyuki City is only a special device which seeks the ‘root’, no matter how violently the magi fight for it, I think the Holy Church would just ignore them. Unfortunately, the ability for the Holy Grail to realize wishes is ‘omnipotent’. It has unlimited, mysterious power to change even the ‘inside’ of the world. If such a great power were to fall into wrong hands, it will become an existence which threatens our belief. This is the reason the Holy Church chose Tōsaka. Instead of ignoring this matter and let the grail fall into wrong hands, it is better if it is wasted on a ‘boring,

meaningless wish'…… But I have a feeling that my father has other purposes in the beginning."

"What you mean is, the other master's fight for the Holy Grail for reasons different from Tokiomi's?"

Kirei nodded his head in response to Archer's query.

"While Tokiomi is a typical representation of a magus, he is also one of the most right-winged. In this era, people who pursue pure magecraft like he does no longer exist. All the other guys are pursuing the gifts of mundane riches. Prestige, desires, power… all these are wishes that can be fulfilled 'within' the world."

"Isn't this great? These are all my favorite things."

"You are but the king who reigned over these uncouth ones, Gilgamesh."

Refusing to reply, Archer merely laughed and finished his delicious wine in a single gulp. At Kirei's apparent evaluation, he did not feel insulted at all.

"Then what about you? Kirei, what wish do you want to fulfill by getting your hands on the Holy Grail?"

At such a direct question, for the first time, Kirei hesitated.

"I……"

Indeed. This is the most fundamental question of all. Why are the Command Seals engraved on Kotomine Kirei's left hands?

"I……do not have any special wish."

At his vague reply, Archer's red pupils emanated a coquettish glow.

"How can that be possible? I thought the Holy Grail only summons those with wishes?"

"It should be like that. But……I am not sure of the reason too. Why would the Holy Grail choose me? Someone without any ideals to accomplish; someone without any cravings to fulfill… Why am I chosen?"

"Is this something worth such frustration?"

Noticing his heavy look, Archer could not help but to laugh loudly.

“If it is not for any desire or ideal, won’t merely seeking pleasure be enough?”

“How dare you!”

Kirei’s fury is basically created unconsciously.

“You want me, a disciple of God, to seek pleasures? ...How can I commit such a sinful act which would cause me to be condemned?”

“Sinful act? Condemned?”

Looking at the serious expression of Kirei's, Archer felt more meaning to those words. Without bearing any goodwill, Archer laughed at him.

“Huh. That was a leap in logic, Kirei. Why did you correlate pleasure and sin?”

“That’s because……”

Kirei could not reply. And Kirei was also unsure how he ended up in such an awkward situation, something he had never experienced before.

At Kirei’s silence, Archer became increasingly full of himself and commented.

“Acquiring pleasures through sins is actually wrong. But humans do acquire happiness through virtuous means. If you say that pleasure in itself is sinful, does it make sense at all?”

Such an elementary question, yet why was he struggling to reply? The reason eluded Kirei. He felt as if a nonchalant unease was locked in an unknown territory deep within his heart.

“……What pleasures? I do not even have them. That’s why I will not seek it.”

Finally opening his mouth, Kirei answered in a voice unlike him at all, unsure and hesitating- as if he could not find the answer and simply came up with some sentence to deal with it.

Archer scrutinized him, then burst out in laughter.

“Kotomine Kirei, suddenly I have a new-found interest in you.”

“……What do you mean?”

“I’m just kidding. Don’t mind me.”

Pouring himself a new cup of red wine, he leaned back on the sofa, speaking loudly.

“Happiness is fundamentally a part of the human soul. There isn’t any ‘yes’ and ‘no’ distinction. It is just whether you are ‘aware’ or ‘not aware’ of it. Kirei, you had only failed to find it from the depths of your heart. To experience happiness, that is the first thing to do.”

“Mind your own business, Servant. Trying to educate me…”

“This is no ordinary education. It is gained by a king from experiencing all the luxuries and pleasures of the world. Listen carefully.”

Despite saying that, Kirei was actually meticulously analyzing everything Archer said.

For some reasons, those haughty words sent shockwaves to his nerves.

“Kirei. First of all, you have to understand something about this thing called entertainment.”

“Entertainment?”

“U-huh. Limiting your views to only the ‘inside’ is not the right way. You must broaden your horizon……Oh yeah. Let’s start by letting you experience my entertainments. How does that sound?”

“For the ‘me’ right now, there is no such thing as ‘time for entertainment’.”

I am different from you, Kirei thought silently.

“Hey, don’t say something like that. After accomplishing Tokiomi’s tasks, you will have lots of time, eh? Your duty is to dispatch spies to monitor the movements of the other five Masters, right?”

“……You are correct.”

“In that case, you shouldn’t just understand their intentions and battle strategies. How about finding out their reasons for seeking the Holy Grail and letting me know about them? That’s not something too hard for you, right?”

Indeed, this type of investigation did not diverge much from the assignment Tokiomi gave him.

Assassin, who observed the everyday life of its target, could easily record their conversations. By analyzing the content of the dialogues, the reason they sought the Holy Grail could then be deduced easily. All he had to do is just to ask Assassin to pay extra attention to this type of conversation.

"……But Archer, why do you want to know such things?"

"I mentioned it before, right? I am interested in the behaviors of human beings. And among those who fight for the Holy Grail, there has to be one or two interesting Masters, right? At least more interesting than Tokiomi."

Kirei tried to cool his head and think rationally. He had only regarded Emiya Kiritsugu with interest, completely ignoring the rest. Besides, he did not have any obligation to agree to Archer's request. However, if he could have some influence over this Servant who was completely out of Tokiomi's control, maybe it would bring some positive effects to the Tokiomi camp in the future.

"……Okay, Archer. I promise you. But this will take some time."

"No problem at all. I have the patience to wait."

After finishing the red wine again, Archer rose from the couch. His movements caused not only the air to waver slightly; the glow within the room fluctuated with him as well. This Heroic Spirit who controlled all the creations of the earth seemed to emanate an invisible radiance from his entire body.

"Ah, I will come again to taste your delicious wine. Your collection can even rival the heavenly wines. To leave them gathering dust in a monk's storeroom is such a waste."

Expressionless, Kirei neither agreed nor disagreed. Maybe Archer took his silence as consent. Wearing a satisfied smile, he left the room.

Right after Archer left, the majestic atmosphere left the room too; replacing it, the mundane atmosphere of the room.

Finally, alone, Kirei started to ponder on the strange conversation he had with the strange visitor.

It was the first time he had a one-to-one conversation with Archer.

Come to think of it, be it Servants or Masters, all of them fight with all they have in this Heaven's Feel to fulfill certain wishes- save that uncontrollable King of Heroes who is apparently not interested in the Holy Grail at all.

Amongst the Servants gathered in Fuyuki city, he had to be the one with the least will to fight. From this point of view, it looks like he shared the same sentiment with Kirei - he had to be the only Master who participated in the Heaven’s Feel without any reason.

No, maybe the reason still existed, just that Kirei hadn’t discovered it yet. There had to be a craving desire for the Holy Grail to achieve certain miracles, maybe somewhere deep within his heart.

Nevertheless, this is definitely not the ‘happiness’ Archer talked about.

The one who knows the answer is not Archer; it is someone else.

The person in question is Emiya Kiritsugu. Everything would have been solved if the conversation just now could instead be between him and Emiya Kiritsugu, Kirei thought.

Of course, their positions were completely different. Thus, they would have discussed using their weapons instead of their words. But it is still alright if that is the case, since Kirei had only wanted to fight with this person called Emiya Kiritsugu; a conversation between men.

As these thoughts played in his mind, Kirei picked up the empty wine bottles tossed away by Archer.

-140:41:54

At the scene of the collapsed Fuyuki Hyatt hotel, the rescue team was working frantically throughout the night.

After the effect of Kiritsugu’s magecraft was lost, the evacuation personnel discovered that there were still two VIPs in the building when it collapsed.

Because they were on the top floor of the hotel when the incident happened, rescue workers lost all hopes at finding them alive. Still, their bodies had to be found before they threw in the towel completely. Under the daylight bright Mobilite, rescue workers quickly cleared the rubbles at the scene using excavators.

At the dawn of the following day, the rescue team that toiled throughout the night was exhausted. At this moment, something strange happened.

“You said you found something strange?”

This was followed by the prompt arrival of the chief of the rescue team to the scene. According to the workers, they found a silver sphere of about 3 meters in diameter amongst the rubble. No matter how they examine it, it did not look like part of the building materials at all. Out of nowhere, it had just appeared suddenly in the midst of the rubbles.

“……Is this from the building? One of the decorations of the revolving restaurant on the top floor?”

“Even if that is the case, this thing is perfectly undamaged. Isn’t that weird?”

At closer observation, its surface did indeed have no signs of damage at all. Reflecting bright light just like a mirror, it looks like it had just been polished.

“Why…does it look like mercury?”

The bewildered chief declared his thoughts as he laid his hands on the surface of the sphere.

At the first contact, surprisingly the sphere sank inwards.

“?”

As the astonished chief looked at it in further scrutiny, he realized that he did not press inwards- he had merely touched it.

“Chief?”

“……”

Not noticing anything strange, the nearby rescue workers wore a puzzled expression and looked at their astounded-looking chief.

“Did anything happen?”

“……we have to remove this thing from this place.”

“Huh?”

“…Use the truck to transport it away. Hurry.”

Suddenly, the chief became unusually composed. In a calm voice he instructed the workers to work swiftly.

Though the workers were still slightly baffled, they knew that the object of unknown origins before their eyes should be removed from the scene immediately. So, they promptly heaved the silver sphere up to the shelves in the truck.

“Huh? Where’s the chief?”

A member abruptly noticed that the chief, who was just overseeing them seconds ago, had disappeared. And from behind the backs of the busy rescue workers, the sound of an engine starting could be heard.

At the driver’s seat of the truck, slowly driving the truck away from the scene, is the expressionless chief of rescue workers. But when the rescue workers noticed this, it was already too late. The truck which carried the silver sphere had vanished among the streets in the dawn light.

Five hours later, at the outskirts of the city, a police patrol discovered the lost truck, with the chief still sitting at the driver’s seat, unconscious. However, the truck which transported the silver sphere on its shelves was now only left with an empty husk.

※※※※※

“……”

“……”

“…Excuse me? Is this Mackenzie’s house?”

“Yeah. This is the name of the owner of this house.”

“……Then, who is…. Sir King of Conquerors Alexander…?”

“I am he.”

“……Ah, ah. Err… I see. Ah, ha-ha……ah. Then can you sign over here?”

“Sign? Alright……done!”

“Thank you very much. So-sorry for disturbing.”

“Hmm. No problem at all.”

At the second-floor bedroom of Glen Mackenzie’s house he was so accustomed to staying as if it is his own house, Waver Velvet woke up from his dreams.

The sun had fully risen. Treating the day as a holiday, he lay idly on the bed, refusing to get up. So, it shouldn’t hurt if I lie about like this, right?

Everything that had happened until now was just like a dream. That unequalled, tragic death match and destruction.

But the engraved Command Seals on the back of his left-hand reminded Waver that this wasn’t a dream.

As Rider’s Master, Waver had witnessed the fierce battle between the five Servants last night - this is an undeniable fact.

At that moment, for the first time in his life, this youth entered into the battlefield; for the first time, weaving in between life and death.

Trepidation, horror; he had never felt them so strongly before.

However, what was left in his heart at this moment……wasn’t fear-related emotions. Instead, impulses full of delight and excitement surged up in his heart.

Waver did not have any accomplishment last night- every action was decided by Alexander, alone. As a Master he had only stood beside his Servant, witnessing everything from the side. Worse still, he fainted at the climax of the battle, rendering him unable to catch the final result of the fight.

Nevertheless, Waver still felt that it was a very meaningful battle. The things and values he obtained from it, looks like only he understood them.

“…not daring enough to even show up before me, coward; you are not fit to be my opponent at all…”

These words were used to insult Lancer’s Master. Lord El-Melloi, someone Waver hated and feared, was laughed at by Rider as a coward.

But the valor Rider held with pride was merely rash idiocy in Waver’s eyes. If he had been the one who planned the battle strategy, he would let his

Servant cross swords in the battlefield, whilst as a Master, he would hide himself behind the curtain to observe the progress of the combat- which is the same tactic as Kayneth. This is what is called as proper battle tactics.

But…

"…the man who is most befitting to be my Master must be a valiant one who charges into the battlefield together with me…"

Of course, Waver wasn't the type of person who can charge into the enemy beside Rider. Hiding beside the bridge, he was actually so terrified that he scrambled into the chariot, wanting to escape immediately. However, this reaction had been mistaken as an act of valor.

Nonetheless, at this time these things needed not to be pursued further.

No matter what his reasons were, Waver could still clearly remember the feeling of Rider's hand on his shoulder - so broad, so strong.

"Yes. This type of person IS my Master." Rider had really said that to him.

Compared to Lord El-Melloi- the prodigy, famous lecturer, someone to whom Waver cannot hold a candle at one time, Waver was way superior then.

His value was finally approved- come to think of it, this was the first time someone acknowledged his ability.

Although praises and slanders are but meaningless things, for this youth who had never been praised by anyone before, being praised by someone else was really exhilarating.

That is why Waver was on seventh heaven right now. No matter how he tried, he could not contain his excitement.

Although his Servant did not treat him with the courtesy demanded by a Master and had always called Waver by his first name, yet, no matter how disrespectful this obstinate was, Waver should at least feel grateful towards him now. After all, Rider was the first one to value him.

"……"

Tortured by his complicated thoughts, Waver stuffed his head under the covers. From today onwards, what type of attitude should he employ when he treats that giant Servant of his?

At this moment, suddenly Waver realized that the usual snores beside his ears in the mornings were absent.

Waver lifted his head from the covers and found out that, Rider who usually sleeps on the bed, was not there. For someone who abhorred spiritual form, he would not simply cancel his physical form and revert to spiritual form without any good reason. Besides, even if he had dematerialized, as his Servant, it is impossible for Waver not to feel any of his presence at all. So, there is only one possibility- Rider was not in the house.

Waver started to think calmly. He had overslept this morning, so it was not unusual for Rider to rise earlier than him.

However, the problem at hand is that Rider was not within the house, which meant that Rider went to other places alone without Waver's permission-

From the stairs of the corridor, footsteps could be heard coming up the stairs.

From these heavy footsteps, Waver could tell that it was Rider, thus feeling slightly relieved. However, recognizing the meaning of such heavy footsteps, Waver paled immediately.

"Oh, so you are awake, eh? Kiddo."

Rider's voice was accompanied by his huge torso which appeared at the door. And regarding the thick suit of armor he was wearing… Though Waver had gotten used to the weird occurrences, he still found it to be an alien and unimaginable thing. If this extremely strange sight were to be seen by the Mackenzie couple, he feared that the hypnosis he casted on them would be nullified very quickly.

Therefore, Waver had, with some difficulty, managed to convince the Servant who downright refused to dematerialize, to stay at the first floor and not moving around as he liked… Of course, that was the case, until this morning.

"……You…went downstairs dressed like this?"

"Don't be scared, okay? The old couple of this house had left early in the morning. So, there are only two of us now. I went downstairs to receive the express delivery package."

Looks like Rider also knew to try his best not to be seen by the Mackenzie couple. Waver, who got slightly relieved at this, suddenly noticed something amiss. Nervously, he examined Rider from head to toe.

In the hands of the giant was a small package with the express delivery label on it.

“……So, you went to the main entrance in this costume?”

“I have no choice what. We cannot send the delivery man away without showing any gratitude, right?”

It was already too late.

But luckily, he was not noticed by anyone staying nearby, only by the postman who comes occasionally to deliver parcels. In spite of that, it was very likely for the word to spread from the postman, saying something like there was a warrior in Greek armor in this house. All he could do was to pray that people would treat his words as a prank.

“Say, this isn’t even your parcel, so you don’t have to express your gratitude, right?”

“Huh? No. It is my parcel.”

“……What!?”

Showing off, Rider let Waver see the parcel- “Fuyuki Town Miyami District, 228 Mackenzie Residence. To the King of Conquerors Alexander”. This preposterous content was openly displayed on the post receipt. On the Distributor column, the words “Specializing in Selling Character Goods: Animan Bar Nando Shop”.

“What is this? Rider, explain.”

“I am just trying out this mail-order thingy. There were quite a lot of products which caught my attention on the advertisement section of ‘World Military Monthly’.”

“Eh? Mail-order?”

When he thought of it, Waver finally understood why Rider further requested for a postcard when he asked Waver to buy military magazines and recording tapes. At that time, Waver hadn’t the faintest idea what the postcard was for… No, it should be that Waver had not even considered it.

“I said, where on earth did you learn mail-order from?”

Although Heroic Spirits can obtain knowledge from the Holy Grail, it would not have been to the extent of learning how to use mail-order. Waver was very reluctant to believe these were all true.

“Huh? This type of trifle, didn’t they explain it clearly at the back of the magazine and the recording tapes? Just look at it for a while and you’ll understand.”

“When did you see those advertisements……huh? Where did you get the money for the mail-order?”

“Don’t worry. I have already paid in full.”

Laughing cheerfully, Rider returned Waver’s wallet to him. Apparently, he had taken his master’s wallet without permission while he was sleeping.

This man is so naïve that he had even wanted to buy an invisible bomber; no one would know what expensive merchandise he had purchased this time. Appalled, Waver took out his wallet and checked the sum of money inside, whilst holding back his tears.

After checking, he realized that the number of 10 000-yen notes inside remained unchanged; just that a few thousand-yen notes were missing. Waver heaved a huge sigh of relief. Because he had collapsed in relief, Waver’s fury at Rider for taking his wallet without permission had diminished.

This teenager was not even aware of his helplessness: Is he considered lucky or unlucky?

As for Rider, he was beside Waver, humming a tone while opening the parcel happily.

“Hoho!”

He shouted in joy after opening it.

“Not bad! Not bad! I like it very much. The real product looks even nicer than the one in the photographs.”

“……A T-shirt?”

Rider removed an XL sized T-shirt from the parcel. No matter how Waver looked at it, it looked just like another cheapskate product. At the front part of the shirt, an eye-catching logo was imprinted on top of the world map - "The Admiral’s Great Tactics". It looked like one of those products from the

games segment published in on the front page of the special edition of the magazine.

“It is really not bad. After I noticed Saber last night, I had a sudden inspiration too. If I wear contemporary styled clothes when I go to the streets, you wouldn’t mind, right?”

Waver’s Heroic Spirit abhorred spiritual form and strongly preferred his physical form. Although Waver had headaches over this matter, the silver lining was that at least Rider did not think of going for window shopping in the streets. Now he is in deep trouble. Waver was angry to the extent of wanting to curse Saber (who gave Rider such an idea) and her Master to death.

Meanwhile, Rider had tried on his new shirt and was displaying various poses, drawing simple happiness from it.

“Hahaha! Just like what I wanted- the effect of having the whole world on my chest. Ha-ha! Really makes me feel happy.”

“……ah, ahh. Yeah, yeah.”

What if he continued to cover his head and sleep over it? If he did so, he would banish the view of this elated Rider, wearing a T-shirt from his sight; and to escape back to gentle sleep. Currently, this is the best idea Waver could think of. When he gets up again next time, the world would be a better place, right?

Such a tempting notion had to be abandoned as Waver thought of what Rider would do next.

“……Hey Rider, wait. I said, wait!”

Noticing that Rider was about swagger out of the house, the nervous Waver stopped him immediately.

“Where are you going?”

“Do you have to ask that? To the streets, of course. To show those peasants the new look of the almighty King of Conquerors.”

To wear only a T-shirt amidst the cold wind in November was already abnormal enough. To top it off, his valiant body was only covered in a T-shirt, nothing else.

“At least wear trousers before you go out!”

“Huh? That thing that causes you to stumble. Oh yeah. Come to think of it, everyone in this country wears that thing.”

Looking slightly troubled, the brown giant who did not even wear underpants held his forehead with his fist, whilst asking Waver seriously:

“Do I really have to wear that?”

“That is a must.”

Although he had not washed his face yet, Waver’s sleepiness had gone up in a puff of smoke.

This inconsiderate, ignorant-to-common-sense muscular idiot who’s as lacking in manners as a gorilla… Once Waver thought of the countless allowances, he had made for him, he could not help but to get angry.

“Let me get this clear. I will not go to the streets to get super big-sized pants just for you. I’ll definitely not go.”

“What didya say?”

With an exaggerated look, Rider stared at Waver. But Waver would not give in this time - he had set his determination with an iron-hard will.

“Hey punk, are you going against my majestic achievements?”

“Your majestic achievements and your trousers are two completely irrelevant things! Before you go out to enjoy yourself, show me what you can! Kill at least one of the opponents’ Servants!”

“Eh? You are quite an impatient fellow. You can engage a Servant in a combat anytime you want, you know.”

“So, do it now! Kill at least one of them! If you do that, I’ll buy you trousers or anything you want.”

Showing a sudden solemn look, Rider became silent.

“……Oh, I see. Understood. For now, as long as I present you the decapitated head of the enemy, you swear that you would get me a pair of trousers?”

At Rider who gave in with such surprising alacrity, Waver felt very helpless instead.

“……So, you really want to go to the street in this T-shirt only?”

“Ain’t the King of Knights doing the same? As the King of Conquerors, how can I be lagging behind her? And no matter what, I like the design of this shirt very much. It fits well with the conqueror outfit.”

This idiot without any tastes was praised down the generations as a hero; is this a dry joke from the historians from the past? Waver’s train of thoughts subconsciously flew past time and space and returned to the distant past.

At this exact moment, boom! An ear-splitting explosion reverberated into Waver’s ears.

No, to be specific, it was not a sound, but a hearing stimulus. It directly attacked Waver’s sensitive nerves of a magus - in other words, a magecraft impulse.

“What was that? ……At the east.”

As a Servant Alexander could also felt the stimulus clearly.

From the open curtains, one could see a layer of cloud dispersing in the clear sky. Although the pattern of the cloud looked like those clouds formed by fireworks, the twinkling glow did not look like normal fireworks smoke at all.

Despite the fact that Waver could see the smoke clearly, because it was formed due to magecraft, people besides magi could not see it. The same goes to the noise. To a normal person, it was but a sound of normal fireworks.

“That position…is where Fuyuki church is, right?”

As one of the master’s participating in the Holy Grail War, Waver had at least some basic knowledge. So, he understood the meaning behind the signal immediately.

As the supervisor of the war, the Holy Church would send that signaling fire every time it has something crucial to inform the Masters. This is the most appropriate means to inform the Masters, as the Holy Church would not have the faintest idea where they would be.

“Is it something related to us?”

Waver struggled to find the best answer to Rider’s question.

“Cannot say that it is totally unrelated to us. How should I put it……”?

In fact, Waver did not announce to the Holy Church his identity as a Master.

As long as he has a Servant on the grounds on Fuyuki city, naturally his position as a Master is established. So, there was no need at all to do things under the Church’s thumb - Waver decided. After all, he had obtained the holy relic through unscrupulous means. If he did anymore extraneous things, would he land himself into deep trouble?

However, it would be safe if he ignored the convention called by the Fuyuki Church. A meeting for all the master’s called by the supervising Holy Church, what emergency could it be? Normally it would be due to amendments to the rules, addition of extra conditions… Besides, it might also announce new information next.

This information might be the key point to the battles henceforth. From the current situation, it would be more beneficial if he listened to the supervisor’s suggestions. And if they were some regulations which restrict him, when the time comes, all he had to do is just to ignore them.

“Rider, we’ll discuss about the trousers some other time. I have some other things to prepare right now.”

“What are you so afraid of? It is hard to get such a nice weather for strolling.”

Throwing the disappointed Rider aside, Waver started doing his preparations.

-138:15:37

A heavy atmosphere hung over the pews of the church.

Noticing the dense demonic aura in front of him, Father Kotomine Risei could not help but to laugh bitterly.

Around an hour had passed since the summoning signal had been released. None of the master’s came to the Fuyuki Church; in place of them, five familiars gathered in the place. Apart from Kotomine Kirei who had withdrawn from the war on the surface and Caster’s Master, Ryuunosuke,

who was not able to see the signal, the other master's had sent their representatives. Looks like none of the masters were bothered about their etiquette towards the church.

Tōsaka Tokiomi had also sent his familiar to the meeting. The rest of the familiars should be dispatched by Einzbern, Matō and the two foreign Masters. This had also proven the fact that Lord El-Melloi, whose whereabouts were unknown after the explosion of the Fuyuki Hyatt hotel, is still alive.

"I had actually prepared the usual pleasantries of greeting especially, but it seems no one has come. So, I'll go straight to the point."

After that simple opening, the old Father faced the human-free congregation - at least there was no human audience present - and continued:

"The War of the Holy Grail, which can achieve all of your wishes, is currently in great crisis. The Holy Grail is supposed to bestow power only to the Master and Servant who seek it, but now there is a betrayer. Ignoring the cardinal obligation of the Holy Grail, he and his Heroic Spirit misused the power granted them to satisfy their frivolous desires."

Risei did not care about the response from the crowd, possibly due to the fact that he had gotten used to preaching as a Father. Though obviously, the congregation could only listen quietly. After a slight cough, the old Father continued speaking.

"We discovered that Caster's Master is the man who is behind the serial killing and kidnapping cases which happened lately in Fuyuki city. He used his Servant to carry out his crimes, but he ignored the crime scene right after he was done, not concealing his traces. What this act of severe violation of the rule of secrecy would bring - I guess you would understand without my explanation."

Although there was no response from the familiars, the masters who heard his words through their familiars should be wavering right now, at least slightly. Just like how Tokiomi reacted this morning; such is the usual reaction of a magus.

"He and his Servant are no longer your individual enemy, but a general threat to the summoning of the Holy Grail. Therefore, I use authority of supervision I have at such critical times, to change the rules of the Holy Grail War temporarily."

In a strict voice he declared, whilst pulling up his right sleeve, revealing his right arm.

Although his body was old, the strong and muscular arm he once had during his younger days could still be seen. Tattoo-like images fully covered his elbow to his wrist -

No, those should not be called tattoos. Those Masters participating in the War of the Holy Grail would know what they were at their first sight.

“These are the things recollected from previous Holy Grail Wars and entrusted to me as the supervisor this time’s Holy Grail War. The inheritance of the masters who lost their Servants before the final battle- their leftover Command Seals.”

After this proof, no one would doubt the authority of Father Risei as the supervisor.

All the Command Seals not used in time were taken care of by him, the overseer.

Command Seals are also known as holy marks, the proof that bore on its back the fate of participating in the War of the Holy Grail. Not only does it carry the significance of fate, it is also a device to control Servants.

The phenomenon of Command Seals is already a kind of miracle by itself. But although this crest on the master’s body possesses enormous power, Command Seals are still a form of exhaustible physical enchantment. Thus, they can be transplanted or transferred through incantations.

“I can transfer these reserve Command Seals to anyone based on my judgment. For all of you who control your Servants, I guess you all know the importance and value of these crests?”

Although he was only facing the familiars whose only duty is to pass what they’re hearing to their owners, Father Risei slowly entered into the state of preaching, and his excitement was aroused.

“All Masters should stop all current hostilities. Everyone needs to destroy Caster with all that he’s got. I will select the Master who manages to annihilate Caster and his Master and bestow him additional Command Seals due to the special case.”

“If this mission is accomplished alone, only that person will be awarded; if many cooperated then all will be awarded. Once I have made sure that Caster is destroyed, the War of the Holy Grail will resume.”

Father Risei rolled down his sleeve and further added.

“So, if there are any questions, you can ask them now.”

A commotion could be heard in the darkness. Sounds of moving chairs, sounds of getting up, and sounds of leaving mingled together, and then vanished gradually.

Since the supervisor’s announcement has been fully understood, it would be meaningless to linger at that place any longer. Currently the masters have nothing to ask. Everyone had probably started preparing for the new competition.

The church had finally reverted to its truly human-free state. Father Risei pondered upon future developments whilst grinning.

After instructing these things, all he has got to do now is wait. Those four hungry hounds would surely drive Caster into desperation.

The countenance of the targeted Master and the location of Caster’s workshop were already known. If the other masters were to be informed efficiency would probably increase. However, if not handled carefully, it might arouse their suspicion. Thus, it was still not the appropriate time to distribute the intelligence gathered by Assassin to the public.

How long can Caster keep up? Risei and Kirei felt that the current situation will not immediately change to a 6 to 1 siege. In his opinion, it would be difficult for the other master’s to naively follow the supervisor’s instructions, focusing on Caster as their main target. This is because they felt that the hunt for Caster was but a mere interlude. Their real goal is still to succeed in the ensuing dogfights.

Everybody craves for more Command Seals. But if the opponents would acquire the same thing, then he would not have any advantage left.

For these Masters, instead of cooperating to obtain the Command Seals together, they would rather destroy Caster on their own to gain sole advantage over the others, although the former was much easier. Furthermore, they might even obstruct each other in competition.

If that is so, it would be troublesome. If each of them obstructed the other, it might be disadvantageous towards Archer’s movements.

All the Masters’ movements would be under the watchful eyes of Assassin, someone they had almost forgotten. Kirei’s duty was executed beautifully. As a magus who learned magecraft at the last minute within a few days, to

be able to use such superior means to control his Servant, this should be something even his teacher Tokiomi could not imagine.

For the sake of his belief, for the tenet of the Church, and for the sake of his promise to his deceased friends; brimming with self-confidence, this child exhausted all that he has, deploying his talents. A great achievement indeed, something even his father failed to accomplish.

Act 6

Act 6.

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Head straight westward from Fuyuki’s busy streets for about thirty kilometers.

There is an east-west orientated state highway that cut through tall mountains far removed from villages and devoid of human presence. A stretch of dense forest occupied both sides of the highway, and this piece of forest seemed forgotten by the torrential upsurge of land development.

Maybe this land is state-owned but based on its register it appears to be owned privately by an overseas company; moreover, it is yet unconfirmed whether this overseas company truly exists. If someone insists on investigating this land, then the first baffling thing would be this legendary urban myth.

It is rumored that in the deepest part of this dense forest, there exists a ‘legendary castle’.

Of course, this myth is only a boring fairytale. Although the forest is undeveloped it is still only about an hour’s drive away from Fuyuki city. If there truly is such an outlandish castle, then everyone would know about it. In fact, people have conducted land surveys in this primeval forest numerous times and have not once found any traces of human structures.

But after every few years, someone would bring that myth up again.

A group of children once walked into this forest half-playfully, half-exploring, and there was also a lost hitchhiker. They saw an ancient castle suddenly appearing out of the dense fog; it was built out of rock and immensely spectacular. No one lived inside the castle and it appeared to be abandoned. But within it there were all sorts of utilities and everything was in perfect order, and people couldn't help but have the illusion that humans indeed live here. It is said to be an extremely uncanny ancient castle.

Obviously, no one would believe in this rumor. The best it can be is a story told by tabloids that have ran out of news material, which used one page in their summer special edition devoted to strange tales to pass it across.

Only a very small number of magi know that this castle truly exists.

This castle only welcomes the owner that enters here to participate in the war every sixty years; all in all, it is a castle of the way of magecraft.

This castle is enveloped by multiple layers of illusions and bounded fields and would never be exposed to the outside except in rare accidents. This is a strange space of existence. The people who know of the castle's existence call this dense forest 'the Einzbern forest'.

When Fuyuki held the Heaven's Feel Jubstacheit, the head of the Einzbern family, felt that it is an inappropriate move to establish an outpost on the land directly subjected to their archrival Tohsaka family. Therefore, he fully used the financial power of his clan and bought all the leyline covered grounds closest to Fuyuki as the Einzbern family's headquarters. That was near the beginning of the third Heaven's Feel, which also coincided with the tense and dangerous times just before the onset of the Second World War.

This broad primeval forest is covered with a bounded field and completely isolated to the outside world, and the Einzbern family transferred everything in their original castle into this forest. From this act, the Einzbern's immense financial power and their extraordinary persistence in pursuing the Holy Grail can be seen. Compared to the Einzberns, the various negotiations the Tohsakas had to make in order to purchase land at Fuyuki and the pains they put in to concealing it all would be a mere laughing matter.

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The dense atmosphere made Irisviel sigh numerous times.

“– Are you tired, Iri?”

Kiritsugu asked. Irisviel hid her melancholic expression and shook her head with a smile.

“It’s nothing, I’m not tired. Keep going.”

Irisviel urged Kiritsugu. Kiritsugu continued to talk about all sorts of intelligence concerning Fuyuki city. A map portraying the entire Fuyuki city was spread on the table in front of Kiritsugu.

“– Two locations are the heart of the entire area. One is the residence of the Second Master, Tohsaka. The other goes without saying; that is Mount Enzo. All the leylines in the surrounding area gather at Mount Enzo. The details are just as Head of the Household Acht had said – “

Servants arrived at the castle before Irisviel and company did and had prepared everything appropriately at the meeting place before leaving. Therefore, the place where the meeting was being held was immaculate. Not a speck of dust gathered anywhere from table legs to teacups, and vases were filled with lively flowers. It’s impossible to imagine that no one has lived here for sixty years.

It’d be a lie to say that she’s not tired. But Irisviel had at least rested in bed for a little while. Kiritsugu, on the other hand, didn’t rest for one minute. It was already near noon when Kiritsugu and his assistant Hisau Maiya arrived at the castle. However, as soon as they arrived at the castle, they received the summons from Fuyuki church, controlled familiars, confirmed the notice from the supervisor and such, and Kiritsugu busily dealt with all these hassles without a halt. Last night, after the battle at the warehouses, Kiritsugu and company attacked Lancer’s Master Kayneth, and even encountered Kotomine Kirei. Another fierce battle ensued. Yet, Kiritsugu didn’t even show a sliver of exhaustion, then there’s no reason for Irisviel to complain of tiredness either.

No, there were other, hidden reasons for Irisviel to sigh.

“– A powerful bounded field was established with the Ryūdō temple on top of Mount Enzo as its base. As a result, apart from Servants, all other natural creatures can only enter the bounded field through the mountain path. Saber needs to be careful of this when she’s moving.”

These words advising caution to Saber could be directly said to Saber face to face. However, Kiritsugu still didn’t even once look at the girl dressed in masculine attire and standing behind Irisviel.

There were two reasons why the air became stagnant and heavy. One was that Saber displayed an attitude of absolute refusal towards Kiritsugu. This attitude of Saber’s didn’t form just now, but it only became more obvious since they arrived at Einzbern castle.

“Also, apart from these two locations, there are two more key positions in Shinto where leylines gather. One is the Fuyuki church on top of the southern hill, and the other is the new housing development to the east of the CBD. To conclude, there are four key spiritual grounds in Fuyuki where it is properly equipped to carry out the Holy Grail’s descent.”

"Then, once the war enters the ending phase and the number of Servants has been narrowed down, we must take control of one of these locations?"

"Correct. Any questions concerning the topography?"

"...Saber, is there anything you are not certain of?"

Irisviel did the tactful thing and tried to arouse her interest. The girl Servant smiled and shook her head.

"Nothing in particular. It was a sufficient explanation."

While the girl in question is probably not aware, from an observer's point of view it was a sarcastic, flippant reply.

With a sigh, Irisviel continued.

"So, as for our policies from now on... It seems all the other masters will hunt down Caster first, right, Kiritsugu?"

"Yeah, that seems to be the case. The supervisor did hint that there would be compensation for the effort."

A while ago, Kiritsugu told them about the announcement from the Fuyuki Church, and the supervisor's revision of the rules; the perverse nature of the Servant Caster and the supervisor's backing in stopping him.

"However, concerning this Caster, it would be more advantageous if we did not join with the other Masters. After all, as of this moment we are the only ones who know his true name... Baron Gilles de Rais."

Kiritsugu, his lips crooked by a cynical smile, continued.

"He must have lost his mind if he's prowling after Saber like that, thinking that she is Joan of Arc. This guy is useful. We don't even need to drive him away, just set our nets and wait."

"Master, that is not enough."

That was the cold, objecting voice of Saber, who had thus far been secluded from the discussion.

"With Caster's personality, if we do nothing and simply watch over him, then the number of innocent victims will only increase. His misdeeds are unacceptable. We should force him out before the damage spreads."

Perhaps Saber hoped that, with her sincere words, she could pass through the wall surrounding Kiritsugu's heart; if so, then it was futile.

As ever, Kiritsugu, with no indication that he even heard Saber's voice, spoke again.

"It'll be fine, Iri. We found no openings in the boundary field, and the alarm and scanning systems have already been checked..."

Biting her lip, Saber's expression became grimmer as she stared as Kiritsugu. While Saber could forcibly endure the way Kiritsugu ignored her, the righteous indignation that he would let Caster do as he wish was too much.

Of course, Emiya Kiritsugu could not be any less concerned by Saber's stare.

"We weren't going to use the castle this time, but the situation has changed. Until we can lure Caster in, we will hold our position in this fortress."

"... But Kiritsugu, don't we need to think of a way to deal with Lancer first?"

Irisviel gave a counterpoint on behalf of the ignored Saber.

"It has been eight hours since you defeated Lord El-Melloi, yet Saber's left hand still won't heal."

"If the curse of that spear doesn't disappear, it means Lancer is still fine. Unlike Archer and his Independent Action skill, the Servant Lancer cannot remain for a long time in the present world without a Master."

Kiritsugu quickly nodded to what his wife was pointing out.

"That's certain. Maybe Lancer formed a new contract with a new Master, or I failed in killing Kayneth... a hindrance came up and prevented me from checking out he was dead."

“If so, in order to face Caster more safely, don’t we need to defeat Lancer first?”

However, faced with Irisviel’s continuous questions, Kiritsugu shook his head.

“We have no need to confront Caster directly when he appears. All you need to do is to use the advantage of the terrain to the maximum. Saber can just run away and confuse the enemy’s line of sight.”

Irisviel was shocked. When Saber heard this from Kiritsugu, she was gaping with anger.

“Not… fighting Caster?”

“All the other masters have set their aim at Caster. Someone is bound to deal with Caster without us lifting a finger. Therefore, we have no need to commit this extra act.”

“Caster is rich picking for all those masters who are chasing Caster with bloodshot eyes. Caster’s sight is locked on Saber. As long as Caster makes a move, then one or two of the master’s pursuing Caster would definitely set foot in this forest and we can attack these master’s sideways. The Master who gave pursuing Caster all their attention would never think that they would change from the role of the hunter to the hunted.”

That was it; such was creditably Kiritsugu’s strategy. In Kiritsugu’s eyes there are no human morals or the pride of being a magus. He is only a predatory machine deducted from the formula of the survival of the fittest.

Kiritsugu originally didn’t plan to come to this castle. Irisviel finally understood Kiritsugu’s intention in suddenly changing his plans and joining forces with her.

“Master, you… just how despicable do you want to be?!”

Saber rebuked loudly and angrily, and Irisviel also felt a faint pang in her heart. Saber’s indignation right now was different from the anger she had last night due to Rider’s mockery and Caster’s boasting – in some ways this was an even more furious anger.

“Emiya Kiritsugu, you’re insulting the Heroic Spirits.”

“I only joined this war to avoid spilling rivers of blood. Fight for the Holy Grail, no meaningless bloodshed, minimize sacrifices, one person taking up the mission of fate instead of armies of men and competing here… this is what we Servants should do.”

“Why don’t you give me the responsibility of joining the battle? You were just like that when you attacked Lancer’s Master last night. One misstep had resulted in a disaster. I have already made a deal with Lancer to fight again! You don’t need to use such despicable means – or is it that Kiritsugu doesn’t have faith in me, who is a Servant?”

Kiritsugu didn’t reply. He kept an indifferent silence as if Saber’s furious words were mere trifles. Irisviel hated that mask-like expression of indifference on Kiritsugu’s face to no end.

That man was not the husband she knew.

She indeed knew that the person Emiya Kiritsugu has dual personalities. She detected that on the one hand Kiritsugu invested all his emotions to his wife and daughter, and on the other hand he hid the scars of the past in his heart. Irisviel knew something about what kind of life Kiritsugu lived before he entered the Einzbern family. But was that the decisive factor that caused the split between them?

Also, the factor that helped Irisviel to realize this was that black-clad woman present in the meeting. That woman didn’t speak a single word, and silently entrusted everything she has to Kiritsugu. That woman was the other reason why Irisviel was feeling melancholic.

It wasn’t the first time she’s seen Hisau Maiya. She had seen Hisau Maiya a few times in the Einzbern castle. It was Hisau Maiya who managed all of Kiritsugu’s worldly businesses outside during the nine years of Kiritsugu’s seclusion.

The woman who acted with Kiritsugu before he met Irisviel. In the duration of this meeting, she didn’t have a sliver of doubt towards Kiritsugu’s words and kept her adamant silence. Perhaps, for Maiya, the Kiritsugu right now was the Emiya Kiritsugu she knew.

Suddenly, a faint aroma drifted into Irisviel’s nose. It was the smell of tobacco. That scent of tobacco had always been with Kiritsugu, from the day she met him. Irisviel still remembered that she detested that smell a lot back then.

She hadn’t smelt that scent for a long time after she married Kiritsugu. Now, the scent of tobacco again emanated from Kiritsugu. Perhaps that is the gunpowder smell of the battlefield.

The current Kiritsugu had undoubtedly returned to the Kiritsugu nine years ago. Back then, in order to win the Holy Grail, Acht took Kiritsugu in. Kiritsugu was like a cruel and merciless hound.

And the Irisviel back then was merely a doll guarding the Holy Grail. As she reminisced Kiritsugu’s past, it was almost as if Irisviel was remembering her own past. As if the nine years the two of them lived together no longer existed. Irisviel’s heart started to become fretful and restless.

Right now, the person closest to the man Emiya Kiritsugu was not her, who is his wife, but Hisau Maiya…

Irisviel did not say what she was thinking of, but asked a completely irrelevant question:

“… How should we deal with the new rule of the war the supervisor had proposed? Didn’t he want us to enter a ceasefire with all enemies apart from Caster?”

“Ignore that new rule. The supervisor only provided the rewards for abiding with the new rule, not the details of the punishment you’d get if you break the new rule. If the supervisor really buggers us about it, we can just pretend we didn’t know about this rule.”

Completely different from his attitude when treating Saber, Kiritsugu replied to Irisviel’s questions thoroughly.

“– Besides, it just doesn’t feel like the supervisor of this war can be trusted and respected. Hiding Assassin’s Master as if he knows nothing about it; he’s probably on Tohsaka’s side. Before we figure out everything about him, we should temporarily regard him with some doubt.”

“…”

Saber was so angry her body was shaking, and countless thoughts roamed in Irisviel’s heart. For a moment, the two of them both sank into silence. Kiritsugu took such a silence as the sign to end the meeting.

“Then the meeting’s over. Irisviel and I will remain in the castle and prepare for Caster’s assault. Maiya is to return to the city and gather intelligence. Report it to me if there are any changers there.”

“Yes sir.”

Maiya nodded unhesitatingly, stood up, and left the meeting room. Kiritsugu stood up a while later, gathered the map and documents on the table, and also left the room. Kiritsugu didn’t look at Saber even once until the end.

Saber, completely ignored by Kiritsugu, bit her lip tightly and angrily and stared at the carpet beneath her feet. Irisviel and Saber remained in the meeting room. Right now, Irisviel didn’t know what words she could say to soothe the fuming Saber.

No, the proud King of Knights, Saber, wouldn’t expect others to comfort her with useless words. Currently, for Saber, the necessary thing to do was to resolve the current problem at its root. When she thought of this, Irisviel put a hand on Saber’s shoulder to show her gratitude towards her, and immediately chased after Kiritsugu and left the meeting room.

That overwhelmingly deliberate ignorance Kiritsugu showed towards Saber – it wasn’t just because the two of them had different beliefs. If Kiritsugu didn’t harbor emotions such as extreme hatred or anger towards Saber, he wouldn’t be able to act so ignorantly towards her. All in all, Kiritsugu had overdone it this time. No matter how much the strategies of the two differed, they were still companions fighting for a common goal. Although they don’t have to respect each other, they shouldn’t humiliate each other either.

Irisviel soon discovered Kiritsugu’s figure. He stood on the balcony that could overlook the front garden of the castle, leaning on the railing, and looked out into the night forest. Fortunately, Maiya’s figure wasn’t beside Kiritsugu.

“… Kiritsugu.”

Irisviel spoke as she slowly walked up to Kiritsugu’s back. She didn’t think that her voice would suddenly become severe. Kiritsugu must have also felt her presence. Because Kiritsugu didn’t appear surprised at all but turned slowly around.

Irisviel was already prepared. Just then, when Kiritsugu confronted Saber in the meeting room, a look of such cruelty seeped out of his eyes. Irisviel prepared to stare straight into Kiritsugu’s cruel gaze. However, when she saw Kiritsugu’s expression when he turned around, she couldn’t help but feel helpless and stood rooted to the ground.

Kiritsugu’s expression was like a hurt and helpless child, forcibly holding back his tears. Kiritsugu looked as if he’s been driven up against a wall. The

Kiritsugu standing before Irisviel right now was so very remote from the figure of that powerful magus killer; he is only a weak and cowardly man.

“Kiritsugu, you –”

Kiritsugu didn’t speak, hugging the confused Irisviel tightly. His chest was shaking. In Irisviel’s eyes, her husband’s shoulders were always strong and powerful, something others can rely on, but now her husband was as helpless as a baby sheltering in the arms of his gentle mother.

“If I –”

Irisviel felt that her husband hugged her tighter, even hurting her. Then, her husband’s weak question sounded beside her ear.

“If right now I decide to throw away everything and run away from here – Iri, will you leave with me?”

Probably, Irisviel would never be able to imagine that a man like Emiya Kiritsugu would ask such a question. She was so shocked she couldn’t speak for a while, and asked back only after a long pause:

“Ilya… that child is still in the castle. What about her?”

“We go back to the castle and bring her out. All who stand in our way will be killed.”

That was a short and crisp sound – but also full of despair. Doubtlessly, Kiritsugu wasn’t joking; he was serious.

“After that – I’ll give everything I have for our family. I’ll protect Ilya and you with my life.”

“…”

Now Irisviel finally understood the feeling of this trapped man in front of her. Kiritsugu, the partner of her life, was facing the greatest battle in his life, and he’s already been forced onto a road of no return.

He was no longer the Kiritsugu from nine years ago. No longer that cold and emotionless hound, no longer that killing machine who endlessly chastened himself.

Kiritsugu had changed. He’s gotten very weak, even forcing himself into such a situation to achieve that very cruel ideal. The key that made Kiritsugu change was none other but Irisviel.

Wife and daughter. They weren't meant to be swept into Emiya Kiritsugu's life.

Originally, Kiritsugu had nothing to lose. He couldn't even feel pain. It was precisely because Emiya Kiritsugu was such a man that he can be extraordinarily strong, he can pursue the immense ideal of saving the world, unhesitatingly sacrifice everything for it, and become a soldier whose cruelty knows no bounds.

The current Kiritsugu wanted to go back to the past, to be the man he was before. But – at the same time that he remembered the past, in the depth of Kiritsugu's current soul an inconsolable dilemma formed. These nine years completely changed Kiritsugu. Kiritsugu was already enduring a huge amount of pressure and pain just to maintain the look of cruelty and heartlessness he had before.

Kiritsugu's ignorance of Saber was exactly the exposure of Kiritsugu's weakness. Currently, Kiritsugu was already exhausted trying to preserve himself. He had no energy to accept Saber, even with no extra energy left to communicate to the King of Knights.

Irisviel's heart hurt terribly. The man she loves with all her heart was being tormented, but there was nothing she could do. That's because the person that caused all of Kiritsugu's anguish is herself.

The only thing Irisviel can do now – was to weakly raise her doubt to him.

"Are we able to run away? We…"

"We can. Now there's still a chance."

Kiritsugu replied immediately. But that wasn't believable. Kiritsugu only said that to allow his own heart to still cherish that illusionary hope.

"– You're lying."

So Irisviel pointed that out, gently, cruelly.

"That's impossible. Emiya Kiritsugu, it's impossible for you to run away. Give up the Holy Grail, give up the ideal of saving the world; you will definitely not forgive such a self. You will definitely be the final judge and declare the death penalty for yourself."

Kiritsugu finally cried out. He understood that too. He had no choices left since a long time ago.

“I’m so scared…”

Kiritsugu sobbed and spoke of what was in his heart like a child.

“That guy – Kotomine Kirei locked his aim on me. Maiya told me that. That guy used Kayneth as bait to lure me onto his hook. He’s already guessed all my plans…”

“I may lose the battle. I sacrificed you, and left Ilya aside, but still… that most dangerous person had already aimed his weapons at me. That guy is the enemy I least want to meet!”

Emiya Kiritsugu, not a hero nor a warrior, but a killer. He doesn’t have the courage and the pride to battle others with his life on the line. He is a coward. Therefore, his goal is to cautiously and with the least risk ensure his victory and the right to survive. For the hunter, the worst nightmare is to be hunted by another.

But even so, if it was the Kiritsugu nine years ago, he wouldn’t so much as lift an eyebrow and would calmly think up the best solution. That was the terror of Kiritsugu when he had no loved ones to lose. But now, when the Kiritsugu who is afraid to lose his loved ones faces battles again, the fear of losing those he loves became his fatal weakness.

“I won’t let you fight alone.”

Irisviel said gently as she caressed her husband’s shaking back.

“I’ll protect you. Saber will also protect you. And… Maiya will also be beside you.”

Irisviel was forced to admit which woman Kiritsugu needs the most at the moment.

Only one person can reawaken the tenacious toughness sealed away in the depths of Kiritsugu’s heart and recall the cruel and heartless personality Kiritsugu had many years ago. But Irisviel would never mention these to Kiritsugu.

If Irisviel still had something she could do, then that is to embrace Kiritsugu, and let Kiritsugu have some temporary solace. However – Irisviel prayed silently in her heart.

It wouldn’t matter if her prayers don’t work. She prayed that the time she’s allowed to embrace Kiritsugu would be lengthened, even for a minute or a

second. Then, she can cure Kiritsugu's pain the best she can with her limited strength.

– Such prayers and the embrace of the two simultaneously disappeared without a trace.

Irisviel's chest suddenly throbbed intensively, and she couldn't help but tense up her entire body. Repeating and intensive vibrations appeared in her magic circuits as soon as she held the forest's bounded field within her own magecraft.

That was the alarm.

"– Here already?"

Her husband muttered beside her ear. Calmly – he returned to the resolute and cruel tone she still hasn't gotten used to.

Kiritsugu detected that something had happened just by seeing his wife's expression. Irisviel nodded silently and left her husband's embrace. The cruel countenance of that 'magus killer' once again emerged in front of her eyes.

"Fortunately, he came before Maiya left. Now we can smash him face on – Irisviel, prepare the crystal ball used to look into the distance."

"Right."

Events were happening much quicker than expected. The whirlwind of battle began to blow in the forest.

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"– He's appeared."

All the main players of the Einzbern camp once again gathered in the meeting room – Kiritsugu, Maiya, and Saber. Before the three of them, Irisviel showed the image the bounded field had captured of the invader on the crystal ball.

The invader donned an inky black cassock, and an evil aura reeled about it. Also, the patterns dyed crimson red on the cloth was as if stained with blood, wavering in and out of view in the forest.

“Is this that Caster?”

It was the first time Kiritsugu saw Caster. Irisviel nodded towards him. The figure reflected on the crystal ball was indeed the weird Heroic Spirit that stopped Saber last night.

“But what’s he going to do?”

What was making Irisviel puzzled was the fact that Caster led a group of people behind him.

Caster didn’t act alone this time. It looks as if he led ten or so people behind him and sauntered forward in the forest. All these people were immature children. Even the oldest only looked like primary school students. All the children wobbled as they walked like they were sleep-walking, while Caster walked at the front leading them on. Undoubtedly, these children were controlled by Caster’s magecraft.

It must be that Caster saw the notice of the supervisor and kidnapped these children from Fuyuki and its surroundings.

“Iri, what’s the location of that guy?”

“Within two kilometers northwest of the castle. Looks like Caster doesn’t intend to go further into the forest.”

The bounded field expanded in the forest is a circle with a diameter of five kilometers and has the castle as its center. Caster’s location was at the edge of this bounded field.

If Caster goes any deeper towards the center of the bounded field, then Irisviel can support Saber in battle. However, as if Caster saw through Irisviel’s intentions, he started circling around the outside of the bounded field.

"Irisviel, the enemy is baiting us to come out.”

Saber said resolutely. She needs only a few minutes to arrive at Caster’s location just with her speed on foot as a Servant. Saber’s thoughts also passed to Irisviel. At that moment, Saber’s mood was extremely anxious, and wanted to go out and smash Caster.

But the King of Knights couldn't do whatever she wanted. The group of children gathered behind Caster – was exactly the reason why the King of Knights was feeling unsettled.

"Hostages… right? Definitely so."

Irisviel muttered melancholically. Saber nodded.

"Triggering the pre-set traps and machinations would harm those children. Only if I go and defeat Caster can these children be saved."

The current situation was clear without explaining. However, Irisviel also had reason for hesitating. Saber's wound is a great disadvantage and it's worrying to have her fight Caster like this. Irisviel instinctively deduced that Caster is a tough enemy. Irisviel couldn't support Saber on the outside of the bounded field. Letting Saber fight alone in such a situation…

At that time, Caster's beast-like eyes suddenly looked up. Could it be that he had already sensed Irisviel's "clairvoyance"?

Caster stared at Irisviel's direction and flatteringly lifted his arms and bowed at Irisviel. It was such a simple thing to do for the magus Heroic Spirit.

"I came here specially to visit you according to last night's promise."

The surface of the solid crystal ball began to waver, and sound began to be passed along from the surveillance location.

"Now, please give the order, to let me be in the presence of that beautiful holy maiden again."

Saber stared at Irisviel, urging her to quickly give a command. The girl who was a Servant had already made the preparation to fight. It was only her master who was hesitating.

As if he saw through Irisviel's thoughts, Caster showed an expression of scorn, spat out a laugh as if he was acting in a one-man's-show, and said:

"… Ah, looks like you still can't make up your mind. I expected to wait for a long while too, so just take your time preparing. C'mon, this is such a boring game – can I borrow a corner of your territory?"

Caster clicked his fingers. The children who were obediently following Caster's back all the time opened up their eyes as if waking up from a

dream. The children looked about themselves helplessly, as if they couldn't figure out where they were.

"Listen children, we're going to play hide-and-seek. The rules are simple. Just run away from me. If I catch you – "

Caster's hand stretched out from the sleeve of the cassock with a swish and caught a child beside him.

"Stop!"

Saber knew that her prevention would have no effect, yet she couldn't help but yell out.

The sound of a skull shattering. Brain matter sprayed in all directions and eyeballs slid down in the air. Those nightmarish scenes were engraved into everyone's mind.

The children let out a harrowing scream and scattered everywhere. Caster, standing in the middle, laughed loudly and happily and licked his blood-covered fingers with his tongue.

"Hurry up and run. I'm going to start chasing you after I count to a hundred. So, Jeanne, before I catch all the children, how long are you going to prepare?"

Irisviel didn't hesitate anymore when she saw this scene. It was impossible for her to hesitate anymore. She is also a child's mother. That child who was killed and then discarded; his small and pitiful figure was exactly the same size as her own daughter Ilya.

"Saber, defeat Caster for me."

"Yes sir."

The King of Knight's reply was extremely short. Saber had already disappeared from the meeting room when Irisviel heard her reply. Only the wind that started to blow behind her was full of extraordinary rage.

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Saber turned into a gust of roaring wind and galloped in the forest.

Now Saber no longer cared about her disagreements with Kiritsugu. Her heart would turn into a sword once at the battlefield. A sword whetted matchlessly sharp and gleaming. It is a sword that had not a sliver of doubt.

Saber knew very clearly that she was running into Caster's battle array of magecraft. Her blood was boiling; the evils that this devil had committed made Saber furious. But what's pushing Saber forward at the moment wasn't her furious mood. Anger and hatred alone would not be able to turn Saber's heart into a sharp sword.

Those slaughtered children. It wasn't as if Saber hasn't seen such scenes before. As long as one is at the battlefield, no matter how unbearable one finds such things to be, those small carcasses would still be seen. For her, who was once King Arthur, it was an ordinary situation seen all the time.

The so-called humans, once they stand at the edge of life and death, would turn incomparably ugly, despicable and violent. Humans are two-legged beasts that ravished women, slaughtered children, and robbed the poor. Nine out of ten times the blood-stained battlefield would become full of such demons.

However, precisely because of that, humans need to 'prove' themselves even if they have sunken into Hell. Prove that humans can still live on with dignity no matter what difficulties surround them. Someone is needed to prove and testify to that.

The one who can testify to that is the knight. The shining star on the battlefield.

A knight must proudly illuminate the entire battlefield by inspiring awe with his justice. He needs to let those fallen souls, reduced to demons, to again pick up honor and pride, and become proper humans once more. Putting aside his own anger, sadness and anguish and focus on the greater good: that is the duty a knight must bear.

Therefore, Saber must defeat Caster. This isn't the urge of anger but her duty.

Saber had to admit such actions are lacking in careful consideration. She couldn't help it if someone rebukes that she acted too hastily. However, Saber isn't someone with only brawn and no brains. Although she predicted that Caster would be a tough enemy, she did not despair; because it's not as if she has no hope for victory. If it is going to be a fight to the death, the last person standing would be her – that was Saber's intuition.

Caster must be defeated. Different from Kiritsugu, Saber had her reasons to defeat Caster by her own hand. She must subdue that devil even if she suffers heavy wounds and damages her strength. This is the duty of the King of Knights, an inescapable obligation. A devil that sullied the meaning of war, a scum that humiliated the pride of humans; Saber would never let such a person go.

The stench of blood became heavier. The mud that wrapped about the edge of her armor stopped Saber's steps.

Behind Saber, the ground was clouded with raised dust, and the disturbed dust was soaked through with dampness. That dampness wasn't caused by rain, but crimson blood.

It was a sickening stench. A sea of blood surrounded her. Just what kind of cruel slaughter did Caster go through to create such an unbearable scene? Saber's heart was torn apart with pain when she thought of this.

And the ones slaughtered were all young and lovely children. Saber remembered those children, screaming with terror, which she saw in the crystal ball. That was something that happened just then. Just a few minutes ago, before Saber galloped into the forest.

Back then they were still lively children. Now they've already turned into scattered carcasses.

"You're finally here. Jeanne, I've waited a long time."

Caster greeted the stationary silver-white figure with a hearty smile. Caster's face was full of complacent smiles as if he was very satisfied with the lavish 'banquet' he was holding. Caster stood in the middle of this sea of blood; his inky black cassock was covered with the fresh blood of the hostages, making his smile spookier and more terrifying.

"What do you think about this tragic scene? Mortifying? Could you even imagine the anguish those innocent and lovely children went through at their end?"

"But Jeanne, this still isn't a true tragedy. Compared to after I've lost you, in order to meet you again –"

Saber had nothing to say, and she had no intention to listen to Caster's long speech either. She wanted to cleave Caster in half with one sword blow; with no hesitation left, she took a step towards Caster.

Caster also detected the killing intent in Saber's advancing step and stopped talking, suddenly pulling his hands out from the edges of his cassock.

The thing that was hidden in front of Caster's chest once again made Saber stop her advance.

It was a child – the sole surviving hostage. He was still sobbing weakly as Caster's forearms held him close. Did Caster leave him alive just to use him as a shield in the battle against Saber?

"– Oh Jeanne, your flaming and anger-filled eyes are so appealing."

Caster, feeling relaxed, smiled briefly towards Saber.

"Do you hate me so much? Yes, you should hate me. I betrayed the mercy and love of God and you would never forgive me for that. You were truly more devoted to God than anyone else."

"Let that child go."

The tone Saber used to command Caster was as cold as a blade.

"This competition for the Holy Grail is to select the Heroic Spirit most worthy of obtaining the Grail. If you use strategies that sully Heroic Spirits, you will be abandoned by the Holy Grail."

"Since you've already been resurrected, the Holy Grail is useless to me… Jeanne, if you really want to save this child's life."

Caster couldn't help but laugh out loud. Then, with his face full of disappointment, he softly let go of his grip and placed the child on the ground.

"Don't cry, child. You should be happy. God's devoted disciple came to save you. The omnipotent God finally answered to your wishes. None of your friends received God's salvation, except you."

It seemed that the young child also understood that this blonde girl who sprinted here was his savior and began to cry loudly at once. At the same time, he ran straight towards Saber.

The child's little hands clasped Saber's shin guard. Saber's fingertips softly brushed past the child's hands. The only thing that can envelope the child and give her solace was the mountains surrounding them. Currently Saber

was in a very desperate situation. She could no longer prepare for battle and take care of the child's safety at the same time.

"It's very dangerous here. Get away quickly. Run this way, and then you'll see a big castle. In their people will help –"

Clack, the child's spine made a sound. His sobs became painful wails.

Saber was shocked beyond words; the little figure in front of her eyes burst apart. Moreover, what gushed out from within the child was not red blood.

It was an inky horde of snakes, countless snakes intertwined together – no, that thing was covered with suckers as big as fish gills, not something as simple as a group of snakes. Are they octopi? Or the tentacles of some strange octopus-like creature? Those tentacles, as thick as Saber's arms, extended in the blink of an eye and wrapped themselves around the silver armor, starting to tightly constrain Saber's arms and legs.

The flesh and blood of the hostage still hung on the demonic monsters summoned from another world – there was more than one demonic monster surrounding Saber. Endless tentacles continued to emerge from the remains of the hostages scattered everywhere; a dozen or so monsters surrounded Saber almost immediately.

Those monsters are about the same size. They have no limbs or a lower body, making them impossible to describe with words. There is a circular mouth at the end of each one of those endless tentacles. The mouths contain razor-sharp teeth like a shark. Although the origins of those creatures are unknown, they're definitely not living beings of nature. They might be creatures from another world, and that world does not obey the natural laws.

"I should have told you beforehand, you should make full preparations the next time you see me."

Caster laughed loudly as if celebrating his victory. As he spoke, a thick book appeared in his hands. The cover of the book was wet and glistening and, unbelievably, a piece of human skin was placed on it. It is only an ordinary book by the look of it, but with Saber's lightning-like senses she could tell that massive amounts of prana surged around with the book as its center and expanded outwards. Without a doubt, that book is Caster's Noble Phantasm.

"This is the magical book my friend and ally left for me. I obtained the means to lead armies of demons using this book. What do you think? Is it that no other army can stand up to the majesty of my demonic army?"

Saber didn’t reply. She was still tightly bound by the tentacles. The rotten and smashed formless carcass still remained in her hands. Those demonic monsters consume the flesh of the hostages as they emerge; therefore, the remains of the carcass no longer had any solid weight. That kid was just crying and clutching to the edge of her clothes a minute before; now it was already reduced to this tragic state.

“– That’s enough. I don’t want to compete for the Grail with you anymore.”

The swordsman Servant, Saber, said quietly. At the same time, she released the anger that has been roaring and fuming in her heart.

The demonic monsters began to retreat backwards. Compared to sound waves, that impact wave brought more force to Caster’s eardrums.

What erupted from the slender body of the girl was a yell of blood-churning anger – and a huge burst of prana. Those tentacles that surrounded Saber’s entire body didn’t endure even a second of her prana burst. They broke into slivers of flesh in the blink of an eye, scattered away and disappeared. Not a trace of the slime that enveloped Saber lingered on her; the silver armor regained its brilliant shine. Amid the hordes of demonic monsters, the girl stood like the god of war, and glared at Caster with burning eyes.

“I ask for nothing in this battle, and I don’t want to obtain anything either. But now… this sword in my hands is made to eliminate you.”

“Ohhhh, Jeanne…”

Caster was awed by Saber’s majesty and began to gasp weakly. His expression – it’s not one of doubt or fear, but slightly lost and confused.

“So noble, so just… Oh holy maiden, even gods fall to shame in front of you!”

Caster’s voice was extraordinarily happy, but suddenly he sank into silence. Taking that as their signal, the fragile tentacles lashed towards Saber like an avalanche.

“I have stained my love! I haven sunken into love’s bog! Oh, holy maid!”

The swinging sword and the mad laughter lifted the curtains of this battle to the death.

※※※※※

Irisviel held her breath and gazed unblinkingly at the turn of the battle in the crystal ball.

The uncanny matter Saber had predicted was also already very obvious.

Considering the special abilities of Servant classes, Saber has an overwhelming advantage over Caster when they battle. When she achieved the class of the Heroic Spirit of the sword her ability of magic resistance was increased in magnitudes. If Caster uses magecraft as his main weapon and intensively resists Saber upfront, then he has not the smallest amount of chance.

But –

Caster is a magus who can summon evil demons.

Saber's magic resistance ability can only be activated when someone targets her to use magecraft. It cannot stop Caster from summoning monsters from other worlds. Moreover, once those monsters are summoned, they would materialize and carry a threat different from magecraft. The teeth and curved claws of the monsters have attack powers equal to swords. The only things Saber could use are her sword and body when facing those monsters.

But even so, Saber, the mightiest in armed battle, would not fear any mere monsters summoned from another world. That is most certain. However, that is something she could only do when her body has no wounds.

The battle of the forest reflected in the crystal ball was definitely not an optimistic situation.

Faced with the monstrous tentacles that continuously attacked her, Saber didn't move back a single step. She still maintained the swift and ferocious attacking posture. Every time Saber waved the invisible sharp sword in her hands, monsters would be cleaved apart in the air. Those hordes of tentacles did not manage to go near the girl Servant a single step.

Saber is completely capable of pushing back the monsters' attacks, but those monsters attacked one wave after another – this means Saber was already in a bad situation where she has to defend with all her might.

Although Saber can defeat the opposing army with her vicious swordplay, Caster was merely standing far away with ease and watching her fight.

Saber couldn’t even get one step closer to the leader of the monsters, Caster.

Countless new monsters with their tentacles continued to grow out of places where they were severed, and endless monsters also emerged from the pools of blood soaking the earth. Those monsters surrounded Saber in layers.

That invisible sword and the continuously summoned and materializing monsters were in a situation where their powers were completely equal to each other. This means Caster holds the reins for this battle. That magus wasn’t trying to get a quick victory but moved step by step, maneuvering just enough forces needed to combat Saber, and got the battle into a deadlock.

It seems like Caster planned to fight a drawn-out battle. He wants to tire Saber out, exhaust all her energy, and then finish Saber off with one blow. Moreover, right now Saber was completely stuck in Caster’s trap.

Perhaps the situation would have been different if Saber wasn’t wounded. It’d be a piece of cake for Saber to handle this group of weaklings. However, now Saber’s left hand was troubled by that curse. Saber’s expression could be seen through the crystal ball; she was evidently very anxious about not being able to fight as she wishes.

“Still no sign of other master’s entering the forest at the moment?”

Kiritsugu’s question came from behind Irisviel. Obviously, Kiritsugu didn’t care too much about Saber’s problematic situation. Irisviel was extremely disappointed with Kiritsugu. However, Kiritsugu looked like he didn’t notice his wife’s disappointment and just silently prepared his weapons. Kiritsugu placed various grenades and small machine guns into the suspender beneath his jacket. This is something quite unbelievable, the preparation of a magus about to enter battle – however, Irisviel saw that the holster by Kiritsugu’s waist contained the magecraft single-loader that Kiritsugu only carried at crucial moments. She understood that her husband had made the preparation to fight the best he could.

“Maiya, escape the castle with Iri. Go in the opposite direction of Saber.”

Maiya nodded undoubtedly when she heard Kiritsugu’s command. But Irisviel couldn’t conceal the uncertainty in her heart.

“Can’t I… stay here?”

“Saber is fighting far away from here, which means this castle is no longer safe because others would think the same as I do. So, it’s very dangerous here.”

Someone may really want to take advantage of this and attack Saber’s Master in the short period of time when Saber is away from the castle. The best time to kill a Master is when the Master and Servant were acting separated from each other.

Between a Master under the protection of his Servant, and a magus that guards his headquarters all by himself, which one of those two enemies is easier to defeat? – Kiritsugu would definitely choose the latter. If another magus chose the same answer as Kiritsugu, he would certainly attack Irisviel, who remained in the castle, once he knew that Saber was fighting alone.

She had finally met up with Kiritsugu, but they are about to be separated again; this made Irisviel very unsettled. She became more unsettled when she detected the pain and conflict Kiritsugu hid in his heart. However, she’s only a burden if she stays by Kiritsugu’s side. After all, meeting with Kiritsugu in the castle is already a breach of the rules they agreed on before.

“…”

Irisviel finally felt the root of her anxiety when she coolly thought things through in her heart. It wasn’t because of being separated from Kiritsugu, but because she has to move together with Maiya. Kiritsugu did originally plan to have Maiya protect Irisviel, but Irisviel still couldn’t get rid of her detest towards Maiya.

But Irisviel wouldn’t go against Kiritsugu’s battle plans due to her personal feelings.

“– I understands.”

In the short time that Irisviel took to nod slightly –

“?!”

A new prickling pain appeared in Irisviel’s magic circuits. This is the information fed back to her by the bounded field of the forest.

“… What’s wrong, Iri?”

“Kiritsugu, it’s just like you feared. Looks like a new enemy entered the forest.”

-130:48:29

Saber sensed the enemy’s intentions after she defeated three monsters.

She didn’t yet know the reason. However, the overly fragile tentacle monsters and Caster’s unnatural degree of confidence triggered Saber’s instinctive alarm.

After defeating ten, Saber finally confirmed the reason for her unsettledness.

The number of enemies didn’t decrease. No matter how many she defeats, new enemies would emerge. Caster’s summoning magecraft continuously called for reinforcements from other worlds.

Even so, it didn’t matter; Saber silently steeled herself. No matter how big the number of enemies may swell into, all she has to do is to defeat them twice as fast here. Driven by her boiling morale, Saber’s sword sped up in the blink of an eye.

Thirty. Since the enemies didn’t decrease a single bit, a flash of anxiety passed over Saber’s heart.

Fifty. Saber understood that it’s pointless to count anymore. It wasn’t just the hostage children’s flesh and blood that acted as the breeding ground for the demonic monsters – from her peripheral vision Saber realized that new demonic monsters were born from the defeated corpses of other monsters. So that was it, no wonder they didn’t decrease. It’s as if the defeated demonic monsters are able to be reborn indefinitely.

If so, then this is a competition concerning the amount of stored prana. Saber immediately slowed her sword when she realized this is going to be a long battle. She won’t last long if she swings her sword with everything she’s got; she can only use the minimum amount of strength necessary to conduct her hunt.

Caster's prana should be definite. Repeatedly summoning and resurrecting familiars would eventually exhaust his prana. The question is whether Saber would be able to last until then.

Saber once again felt worried with the fact that she can't use her left hand. She has to use prana bursts to compensate her lack in strength when she's only using her right hand to wield her sword. In this situation, any extra spending of prana is a burden heavier than anything else.

Originally, if she could hold the hilt of this sword with both hands – using one blow of Excalibur • the Sword of Promised Victory should completely vaporize this filthy trash.

Saber kept fighting with her sword despite her bitter remorse. Although over a hundred monsters have been defeated, Caster was still smiling with ease while admiring Saber's struggling battle. Saber looked at her enemy, who didn't show a single sign of exhaustion, with shock on her part, and once again noticed the extraordinarily dense amount of prana the magecraft book in his hands was releasing.

"Could it be…"

Although it was a most pessimistic guess, but it probably shouldn't be wrong.

It was summoning magecraft that summoned these countless demonic monsters, resurrected them, and urged them to relentlessly rush towards Saber's sword. And the one reciting the spell was none other except that book of magecraft.

It isn't merely a pile of paper which recording spells. That book is probably a prana furnace with an incredible capacity, a 'monster' that can use magecraft just by its own power. Caster wasn't reading the spells from the pages of the book, but just freely manipulating that book which served as a prana source.

Prelate's Spellbook • The Text of the Spiraled Sunken Citadel – it is indeed a terrifying Noble Phantasm. Had Irisviel been Saber's proper Master, she should have seen through his abilities the first time she met Caster and recognized that the opponent is an extremely dangerous Servant with an ability to modify the power of his Noble Phantasm. Had she known of it, Saber would definitely not have fallen so easily into his trap and locked in a dragging battle with Caster even if she's scorned for being a coward; she might have acted more prudently.

No – regret is a display of weakness.

Saber yelled to herself. A knight that fought for honor and glory cannot be allowed to retreat before evils such as Caster. If so, then she would be giving up on the greatest strength and weapon at her disposal – the heart of justice that believes in her holy sword.

“This brings back memories, Jeanne. It’s all just like back then.”

Caster, wearing a trance-like expression as if he was gazing at a holy painting, looked upon Saber’s increasingly miserable battle.

“Even if you’re in a dangerous situation overwhelmed by enemies, you never feared, did not succumb, and your gaze never doubted your own victory. You are indeed the same. That noble vigor, that dignified soul, is undoubtedly evidence of the holy maid Jeanne d’Arc. It’s so obvious…”

Full of nonsense as always, but Saber subdued the anger filling her heart and concentrated on killing the sundry weaklings before her. It would only encourage her enemy if she rebuked him word by word.

“Why? Why have you still not awakened to the truth? Do you still believe in God’s protection? Do you think miracles would arrive to save you in such a desperate situation? – How lamentable! Did you forget the battle of Compiègne? Forgot God’s trap that pushed you down from the zenith of glory to infernal destruction? Do you still consent to remain God’s puppet even after so much humiliation?”

She really wants to block that mouth which is blabbering nonsense. She really wants to let him know just what judgment would be passed onto the sin that he’s committed, robbing the lives of children due to his boring vain hopes – but even as she thought that, her sword can’t touch him at all. Saber was stopped by the wall of demonic monsters that overwhelmed her tenfold and twentyfold. Her distance from Caster was too great.

Saber leapt into a slight gap but a tentacle behind her wrapped itself around her head. Although she reflexively stretched out her hand to grab it before it wrapped around her, her left hand, with its thumb completely out of her control, slipped powerlessly across the skin of the tentacle.

And as soon as Saber stopped, all of her field of view was completely covered by the wall of tentacles. She can only use a prana burst to blow them apart. But this many of them…

In the blink of an eye, a golden red lightning flashed past, and pushed back that alien horde.

In front of Saber, who was gasping after her bondage were taken off, a tall figure dressed in teal armor entered her sight.

“How unsightly, Saber. If your swordplay can’t get any more awe-inspiring, then the title of the King of Knights would cry out for help.”

This handsome man, whose beauty is almost a sin, gave a stunning look to Saber standing dumbly aside. Only because of her magic resistance ability can she endure this alluring gaze. Contrary to the burning brilliance of his two spears, Diarmuid ua Duibhne’s smile seemed incomparably sweet and refreshing.

“Lancer, why…”

But Caster’s surprise was much greater than Saber’s.

“Who are you!? Who gave you the permission to dare disturb me!”

“That’s what I was going to say, heretic devil.”

Lancer stared coolly at the provoked Caster and pointed the top of the short spear in his left hand towards him.

“It’s because you are so insolent; Saber’s head is destined to be the medal hung beneath my spear. Your act of stealing my fruit of victory is an impudent and despicable thing to do on the battlefield.”

“Nonsense! Nonsense nonsense --!”

Caster clawed his head, bulged out his eyes, and made weird sounds in his throat.

“My prayers! My Holy Grail! They were all to let that woman reawaken! She is mine… every piece of flesh, every drop of blood, and even that soul is all mine!!”

But Lancer wasn’t overwhelmed by Caster at all; he shrugged his shoulders and took a deep sigh.

“You listening? I’m the one who wounded Saber’s left hand. Only I have the right to exploit her single-handed disadvantage.”

Slowly, Lancer lifted up the tips of the twin spears by his sides and took his unique double-spear stance. Standing in front of Saber, it was as if he shielded the King of Knights behind his back.

“Oi, Caster, I’m not meddling in your love affair. If you are set to make Saber succumb to you and take her away, feel free to do it. Only that –”

A burning and yet desolate resolution filled the handsome soldier’s eyes as he proclaimed.

“Don’t even think about putting aside Diarmuid. I won’t ever allow you to defeat the single-handed Saber! If you don’t back down, then from now on my spears would act as Saber’s left hand.”

Now that she thought about it, this is the second time that Saber looked at the spearman’s back in this fashion. Last night, as she faced Berserker’s furious attacks, Lancer also intervened in this way. Is all this just to finish all of his business with her, who once crossed swords with him?

“Lancer, you…”

“Don’t get me wrong, Saber.”

Lancer’s sharp glance stopped Saber from continuing.

“My Master’s commands for me today are only about defeating Caster. There are no orders concerning you. Because of that, I deduced that the best thing to do would be fighting together. What do you think?”

Lancer’s words aren’t exactly an explanation of why he arrived to help out Saber’s crisis. This spearman didn’t need to do this. He could have chosen the moment when Caster is completely engrossed in dealing with Saber and looped around to Caster’s back to launch a surprise attack.

Saber didn’t question him why. She just nodded at Lancer, who had a hint of a smile on the corners of his mouth and stood at his right.

Saber no longer paid any attention towards the left but held her sword and faced her right. Right now, she has the most trustworthy left arm.

“I’ll just get this clear – Lancer, just my left hand alone would be able to defeat a hundred such small fries.”

“Huh, that’d be easy. You can just be left-handed for today.”

The two Heroic Spirits joked with each other and sprang toward the gathered demonic monsters. The holy sword and two demonic spears cleaved apart the mass of tentacles that stretched towards them from all directions.

“Unforgivable… enough with your boasts, puny man!”

The magecraft book in Caster’s hand throbbed weirdly as if reinforcing his roar; pages flipped by themselves continuously. All of sudden, the number of demonic monsters that emerged doubled. The mass of tentacles that looked as if they will drown out the forest surged towards Saber and Lancer.

The fiercer, more tragic second act of the battle began.

-130:45:08

It was pure luck that Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald captured Caster’s figure in his sight in Fuyuki.

Although he was dumbfounded upon discovering that figure in a inky black cloak, obviously from the wrong era, strolling casually along the suburban streets at dusk, Kayneth began his chase when he saw Caster stopping a small truck that passed by, gave hypnotic suggestions at the driver, and then sat in it with the children as if it was a kindergarten trip.

A battle between Servants can only be conducted away from other people; however, the truck carrying Caster was incidentally driving towards the remote mountains far from the city. Kayneth snickered as this suited his purpose perfectly but began to hesitate when he realized their destination is the Einzbern forest.

He’s already heard of the Einzbern territory near Fuyuki when he conducted investigations beforehand. Since it is a territory of magi, it would therefore have its matching bounded field, making it a location where others would find it hard to battle with an advantage. Despite that, leaving aside the true reason for Caster to specially travel here – his intention of challenging the power of the Einzberns is obvious. If so, then maybe there’s a chance to gain something in the battle. Kayneth made up his mind and stepped into the forest with Lancer.

Just as he thought, Caster began fighting Saber, who materialized to counter his assault. From his fuddled speech and acts it can be seen that Caster, already roaming, is acting alone, but Saber’s Master still didn’t appear. He probably deduced that he can protect himself alone even if he doesn’t stay beside his Servant since this is in his territory and decided to observe the battle in his headquarters away from the frontline.

So Kayneth decided on his own strategies.

He ordered Lancer to assault Caster. For Kayneth, who has already spent one Command Seal, the reward the supervisor brought up concerning defeating Caster is something he'd do anything to obtain. However, even if he defeats Caster here, it would seem that he's on the same side as Saber. The Einzbern Master would also be given the extra Command Seal. It's something that Kayneth definitely doesn't want to see.

Therefore, Kayneth decided to leave Caster to Lancer, and he himself would secretly enter the Einzbern castle alone. If he wants to claim Caster's head as his own, all he has to do is to get rid of Saber's Master at the same time.

Although it is a bold challenge, Kayneth has unshakable confidence in himself. No matter what defenses Einzbern had made, he's willing to bet the title of Lord El-Melloi that he is able to break it apart. He's got to show this kind of courage if he wants to amend the defects Sola reprimanded him for last night. For Kayneth, the most pressing problem for him right now is to have his fiancée take back her insults.

Kayneth moved toward the depth of the forest as the seething vigor boiled inside him. Although illusionary magecraft has been cast upon the forest of the bounded field, Kayneth's outstanding knowledge and instincts allowed him to make precise deductions, and easily found the location of the central axis of the bounded field. It wasn't for nothing that he has the mighty title of the greatest genius of spirit invocation.

If the magecraft of the Einzberns is only to such a degree, then just how the castle is defended is very clear.

Kayneth still had enough ease left to snicker. Although many magecraft artefacts he brought from England were lost when the hotel collapsed, his strongest trump card, his Mystic Code, has always been by his side. Therefore, he didn't feel that his strength in battle weakened at all.

The trees hindering his sight suddenly disappeared, and the antique stone castle appeared before Kayneth. So that is it, one would expect no less from these prestigious northern magi; even a relocated castle is a building whose size deviated from normality. But Kayneth is also the son of the prestigious house of Archibald. Even if the castle's majesty can overwhelm others, the only sentiment it rose from him was a snort.

Not bad. After Einzbern is dealt with, it wouldn't be bad to take this castle and make it the new headquarters…

After Kayneth lost the Hyatt hotel suite he had obtained an abandoned factory on the outskirts of the city as his temporary base and hid Sola there. Obviously, his fiancée's mood couldn't be worse. After all, it's an environment that Kayneth's pride won't tolerate.

If he's decided on this, then he has to keep the destruction of this building at the minimum.

Kayneth laughed presumptuously and placed the large porcelain vase he carried under his arm on the ground. Once it left his hand, the vase sank deeply into the earth. This vase, which was under a spell of weight reduction to make it easier to carry, has a true weight approaching 140 kilograms.

"Fervor, mei sanguis."

Once he chanted the spell that activated the magecraft, the thing in the vase oozed out from the mouth. That liquid, giving off a mirror-like metal sheen, is a large amount of mercury. Flowing out of the vase as if it is a disciplined primeval creature, the ten-kilograms-or-so mercury, shivering, formed a ball.

Among the many of them in his possession, this is the Mystic Code Lord El-Melloi took pride in – Volumen Hydrargyrum • Moon Spirit Cerebrospinal Fluid.

"Automatoportum defensio: Automatoportum quaerere: Dilectus incursio."

Following Kayneth's low chanting, the surface of the mass of mercury vibrated and rustled as if answering him and followed his feet on the ground to approach the gates of the castle.

Kayneth, who possesses the two attributes water and wind, a feat rare even among magi, excels in the art of manipulating flow, which is shared between these two attributes. He thus created this unique Mystic Code, using mercury filled with magecraft as his weapon, and controls it at will.

The shapeless mercury, can also be sculpted into any shape –

"Scalp!"

As Kayneth yelled, a part of the mercury ball suddenly became a long and thin ribbon extending upwards. Then, the mercury ribbon savagely thrashed towards the door like a whip.

As it was about to hit, the mercury whip suddenly compressed itself into a thin edge of only a few millimeters thick, becoming a mercury blade as sharp as a razor. Attacked by this mercury blade edge, the heavyset bolt was cut in half as smoothly as if it was a piece of tofu. The great gates collapsed inwards with a heavy groan.

Mercury is a heavy liquid in room temperature; when it moves rapidly under high pressure it would possess a mighty kinetic energy. Moreover, mercury can change into shapes such as whips, spears, and blades at will. Its sharpness can even overwhelm laser rays, rivalling pressurized water jet cutters.

Perhaps he carries with him the confidence of an assured victory. Because, in front of Lord El-Melloi’s Volumen Hydrargyrum, even the most stolid defense won’t stand a chance. Be it titanium alloys or diamond, nothing is unbreakable.

Kayneth walked leisurely towards the great hall of the castle after he’s finished with the obstacle in front of him. The crystal chandelier in the hall emanated brilliant light and the marble floor, polished extremely smooth, had not a single flaw.

Even the air felt extraordinarily still, with only Kayneth’s presence – of course, not a single person came out to greet him.

"The ninth head of the Archibald house, Kayneth El-Melloi, asks for an audience!"

Kayneth, with an air of command, proclaimed loudly in the deserted hall.

"Magus of the Einzbern! For the Holy Grail that you seek, betting your life and pride, come out to meet me!"

Despite Kayneth’s taunting declaration, no one responded. It was as if they weren’t looking forward to duel with Kayneth. As though he was made to look foolish, Kayneth sighed, and walked toward the center of the hall with heavy steps.

The moment Kayneth arrived at the center of the hall, the four flower vases placed at the four corners of the hall suddenly exploded with an enormous roar. However, it wasn’t porcelain fragments that flew out from the explosion but countless metal beads. Those metal beads sprang toward Kayneth like bullets.

This machinery was constructed free from magecraft. Kayneth didn’t sense any scent of magecraft activation. Therefore, it must be machinery

Kiritsugu set up in the vases. It is anti-personnel mine called a Claymore, a cruel pre-set bomb. When each bomb explodes, they will release, simultaneously, 700 or so steel balls with a diameter of only about one or two millimeters. These steel balls would radiate outwards in all directions in a fan formation, a terrifying weapon that people say is made to completely destroy infantry units with one strike. When it explodes, one won't even have time to escape; the only thing the target at the center of the bombs can do is prepare to be beaten into a sieve.

– Of course, provided that the target isn't a magus.

In the split of a second before 2800 steel balls reached Kayneth, the spot he was standing on became enveloped by a silver semi-circle. The mass of mercury lying recumbent beside his feet suddenly changed form.

Although the tight, thin mercury membrane wrapped around Kayneth was barely one millimeter thick, its surface tension reached the strength of steel when supported with prana supply. Out of the rain of beads that the Claymore mines dispersed not one of them hit Kayneth. All they did was getting reflected back to the hall and hammered the setups in the room into smithereens.

This is Volumen Hydrargyrum's "automated defense" mode. This pre-set magecraft can automatically respond when Kayneth is threatened, forming a powerful protective membrane in a split second. This kind of reaction speed can even defend from bullets. It was also this defense system Volumen Hydrargyrum created that protected Kayneth and Sola when the Hyatt hotel collapsed. The malleable mercury is a perfect weapon that gathered attack and defense all onto itself, being Kayneth's sword and also Kayneth's shield.

"… Hm."

Kayneth, after he removed the protective membrane and saw the tragic scene around him, snorted with derision at the baseness of the machination. Even Kayneth, who didn't know much about military equipment's, understood that it wasn't magecraft that assaulted him, but simply ordinary weapons filled with gunpowder.

Kayneth's mind finally had some idea about the truth concerning the unpleasant experience last night.

He doesn't even need to analyze it. Among the other six Masters, the only one who wants to destroy Kayneth more than everyone else is Saber's Master, the Einzberns. However, how could the magus of the Einzberns, being such a high-born house with eminent prestige, use such a base

method? Kayneth, who takes pride in being also from a prestigious family of mages, found this impossible to believe.

However – now he has to believe this. The one who used explosives to destroy Kayneth's workshop last night with absolutely despicable methods is hiding in this castle at this very moment.

"… Fallen so low, Einzbern?"

Kayneth mumbled, with more lamentation than anger in his tone. It probably isn't Saber's Master himself who used such despicable methods, but some lowly guy they hired somewhere else. But even so, it is still a very corrupted thing to do. They invited an irrelevant guy onto this holy battlefield. This is utterly unforgivable.

– Fine, then it's not a duel anymore, but my crusade towards you.

Arousing his intent to kill once again, Kayneth walked deeper into the enemy's defenses.

Through the CCD cameras concealed in the main hall, Kiritsugu meticulously observed the power of Volumen Hydrargyrum, Lord El-Melloi's pride.

Using spells to manipulate mercury for automatic protection – although he's heard about this before, he never thought that the real thing would have such powerful abilities. Even the shockwave of the Claymore mines wouldn't beat its defense in speed. If that's the case, then he can't expect to use firearms to obtain victory.

Although Kiritsugu was very annoyed, he had to admit that this magus indeed possesses first-rate skills. Actually, when his machination at the Hyatt didn't succeed, he should have known of this already.

In other words, this is an opponent that Kiritsugu must confront as a "magus."

Right now, to find the enemy hiding in this castle, Kayneth must be searching all of the rooms on the first floor one by one. At the moment Kiritsugu is located at the innermost part of the second floor. If he acts immediately, he should have enough time to choose a place advantageous for him to face the enemy.

Kiritsugu analyzed the plan of the castle in his head as he walked out of his room and towards the door – his footsteps stopped.

A drop of mercury, like a thread of cobweb, hung in the door’s keyhole. Although it was only a tiny bit of mercury, Kiritsugu could still see it drooping toward the ground as it left a silver trail on the surface of the door.

The drop of mercury suddenly stopped moving downwards the moment Kiritsugu saw it. Then, it retraced its tracks, retreated back through the keyhole as if it was alive, and disappeared.

"… So that’s what it is; an automated search."

Immediately following Kiritsugu's bitter words, a ray of silver light sprang up from below the salon's carpet.

In the blink of an eye, a circle was cut out on the floor at the center of the room and fell to the ground below. Then a silver tentacle leapt up from that circular hole.

In front of Kiritsugu, Volumen Hydrargyrum’s new shape was like a metallic jellyfish. Endless tentacles grabbed the edge of the opening on the floor and their base, in the middle of the tentacles opening out like an umbrella, was expanded into a flat, bowl-like platform. And the one standing on the platform and smiling was none other than Lord El-Melloi.

"I finally found you. Little mouse…"

Before the triumphant Kayneth ordered the mercury to attack, Kiritsugu had already drawn the Calico submachine gun from his waist holster and opened fire.

Reacting immediately, Volumen Hydrargyrum speedily formed a protective membrane in front of Kayneth and blocked all the might of a rain of 9mm bullets. It took only a few seconds to empty fifty bullets.

But it’s preciously those few short seconds that gave Kiritsugu more than enough time to chant his spell.

"Time alter – double accel!"

Following the pronounced spell, the prana inside Kiritsugu began to gallop at light speed.

"Scalp!"

Kayneth gave the proclamation of death the moment Kiritsugu’s firing ceased.

The two mercury whips that leapt up following his voice flew towards the prey in front of them with a pincer formation, attacking from the left and right.

"Hm!?"

It was Kayneth who gave an exclamation of surprise.

The moment the two silver whips were just about to hit the target, Kiritsugu dodged the silver whips' attack with an almost unbelievable speed and quickly leapt below the Volumen Hydrargyrum, on which Kayneth was standing – into the hole on the ground that the mercury blade just cleaved out.

Kiritsugu's speed was so fast that human eyes couldn't see his movements clearly. No matter how you think about it, it shouldn't be a physical feat ordinary people can perform. Although Kayneth did feel he was a bit careless, he wasn't too surprised with this strange change happening in front of his eyes. After all, this is the battle between magi that overrides ordinary rules. It wouldn't be odd even if a little mouse mixed into it possesses extraordinary abilities.

"Oh? Also know a little bit about magecraft?"

Although a small smile passed across Kayneth's face, the intent to kill was already within his heart. Whether he is an ordinary mouse or not, even if he's had some teaching in magecraft, he is still a lowly man who used dirty means. Such actions, which humiliate magi, cannot be tolerated.

"Scum… I'll make you know what death tastes like."

Kayneth flipped the tail of his coat and leapt down to the first floor. Then, Volumen Hydrargyrum removed its jellyfish shape and slowly fell down too.

"Ire: Sanctio!"

The mercury's thin tentacles scattered after receiving his orders, and once again scanned through the entire first floor. The mercury immediately confirmed the location of the target. Approaching that location following the tracks of the tracing mercury, a sliver of a bloodthirsty smile emerged on Kayneth's lips.

Kiritsugu, traversing the corridors, felt that his whole body was being devoured by the aftereffects of using his magecraft.

The skill he used to dodge Kayneth’s Mystic Code just then wasn’t a basic physical enchantment. It was an advanced magecraft with a greater range of utility – and obviously with far stronger side effects.

The ability to separate the passage of time inside a designated space from the "flow of time" in the outside world; in some ways, Time Manipulation can be regarded as a type of Reality Marble. Although it is classified as a greater magecraft, it is definitely not "magic" which cannot be replicated. Compared to "time modification", which can reverse cause and effect and change the past, this is merely the magecraft of "time adjustment" that can stagnate the time that had passed and accelerate the time in the future. Therefore, it is not a magecraft of extraordinary difficulty.

The only problem one needs to consider is the size of the bounded field and the scope of time that needs to be modified.

Kiritsugu’s root, the Emiya family, spent generations researching and seeking the magecraft that controls time. The magic crests existing on Kiritsugu’s back inherited the fruits of research from generations of men. But the amount of prana one needs to spend, and the rituals needed in preparation to activate this kind of magecraft rivals in magnitude with the greater magecrafts. Therefore, it has to be prepared and used strategically. For Kiritsugu, who made up his strategies to just survive on the battlefield, it was originally a rather useless inheritance.

However, to use the "time control" ability he’s inherited at the maximum, Kiritsugu created a flexible way of utilizing this magecraft at a very small scale.

A method that kept the scope of the bounded field within the practitioner’s body made it easier to establish a Reality Marble. Although it is impossible to completely isolate the flesh from the outside world, it can minimize the affect the outside world has on the body. Within this minimal bounded field, he "adjusts" just a few seconds of time; this is the magecraft that Emiya Kiritsugu created, Innate Time Control.

For example, when he fought Kayneth just then, Kiritsugu "sped up" his blood flow, haemoglobin metabolism, and muscle movement all at the same time. All that’s left is to use his quick reaction time to dodge the attack after he easily predicted the track the mercury whips would take. Kiritsugu is capable of accomplishing physical feats impossible for ordinary humans after he accelerated the time inside his body.

The biggest problem for this magecraft is the huge burden on the body.

The craft of time modification inevitably creates errors between the time within and without the bounded field. This error would immediately be corrected by natural forces when the bounded field is removed. That is, the "world's own adjustment". Of course, this adjustment can only happen where "errors have occurred", which means inside Kiritsugu's bounded field – his physical body. Adjustments have occurred in his flesh to get back in sync with the normal time flow.

Death is the accompanying danger born from using magecraft, but Innate Time Control is above all Kiritsugu's riskiest technique. Just now, it was as though he was tightrope walking while his flesh was being shredded.

Compared to Kayneth's unrestricted magecraft, Kiritsugu's ability is not powerful. But this doesn't mean Kiritsugu has no chances of victory now. Because the best chance Kayneth had at killing Kiritsugu – the strike just then – had already been missed. Although Kayneth may have not realized it, for Kiritsugu it was his biggest mistake. Kayneth had already exposed the true form of his Mystic Code, and also gave Kiritsugu the chance to analyze it. After that, it's "hunting time" for the Magus Killer.

As he ran, Kiritsugu exchanged the helical magazine on the Calico for a new one. The bullet in the Contender were also changed into a normal one. It's still a bit early to use the final killing move. He needed to provoke Kayneth even more in order to kill the enemy with one strike.

Lord El-Melloi's mercury Mystic Code united attack and defense, and also possessed the ability to search out enemies. However, Kiritsugu had already spotted the flaw in this magecraft with its three advantages.

First, its ability to search for enemies –

Kiritsugu suddenly stopped as he turned a corner and hid in the shadow of a pillar. The mercury wasn't just approaching from behind him but spreading silently over the entire corridor and getting closer and closer. Most likely, the mercury tentacles were spreading out into a giant web and sealing off all of Kiritsugu's exits.

Using liquid metal as a sensory tool – how is it passing the perceived information back? There are no specialized senses such as sight, smell, taste, which is why Kayneth can control it so fluently. Therefore, those ways of communication are out.

The most probable would be through touch. But when Kiritsugu was discovered at the second floor his location was pinpointed without him contacting the mercury.

However, if the mercury is extremely sensitive to touch, then it'd be able to make judgements based on vibrations in the air. It should also be able to sense differences in air temperature and find a heat source.

Kiritsugu chuckled as he stared at the mercury web approaching from all directions. *That thing doesn't have eyes*. Therefore, if he contorted his heartbeat, breathing and body temperature, he can make his existence completely transparent.

"Time alter – Triple stagnate."

Following the chanting of the spell, Kiritsugu's field of view suddenly became very bright.

Of course, the outer world didn't make any changes; it's just his delusion. While Kiritsugu's optic nerves registered whatever he saw, his cornea received three times the light a person's eyes would normally receive.

The time control this time is the exact opposite of the accelerated physical speed back then. Kiritsugu slowed his biological processes to one third of its normal speed. His breathing lagged, and his heartbeat slowed and stagnated until he could barely feel it himself. Also, due to his metabolism having stopped, his body temperature declined quickly, cooling down until it is not much different from the temperature of the outside air.

The mercury flew abnormally quickly and anxiously in front of Kiritsugu, who was as still as a statue. As he expected, the mercury couldn't detect him now. Kiritsugu's shallow breathing and slow heartbeat was muddled with the noises of the natural world. The mercury can no longer recognize the current processes of Kiritsugu's body using the standards of a human.

The searching mercury web speedily retreated after it deducted that there are no signs of the enemy, retracing its steps. The sound of footsteps on the marble floor followed. Since he thought no one is here, Kayneth walked on without taking any precautions…

"Release Alter!"

The brightness of his sight and the sharpness of his hearing returned to normal in the blink of an eye. Kiritsugu's heart also began to beat extremely quickly; all the blood vessels in his body hurt as if they are going to burst. Within his body, blood flow was adjusting to go up to three times its original speed. In fact, there must be bruises forming somewhere on his body due to internal bleeding coming from burst capillaries.

But Kiritsugu already leapt out from behind the pillar before his body had fully adjusted. When Kayneth, who just arrived at the corridor, reacted, Kiritsugu was about fifteen meters away. He immediately opened fire with the Calico in his left hand at the magus whose eyes widened in surprise.

Although Kayneth was shocked, the Volumen Hydrargyrum still displayed its abilities accurately and loyally this time. The protective membrane opened up in the blink of an eye and again blocked the storm of 9mm bullets. Everything was like a replay of the scene before.

"– Idiot. These are just boring tricks!"

Although he was at a loss with the unexpected ambush, Kayneth, hidden within the protective membrane, couldn't help but laugh when he discovered that the attack was a shooting as unthreatening as the last time. But he didn't know that the opponent he was mocking had also figured out the weakness of his automated defense.

Before the Calico stopped firing, Kiritsugu's free right hand had already pulled out the Contender and fired a shot at the center of the expanded, semi-circular mercury membrane.

Volumen Hydrargyrum had already adapted to the best physical shape to protect against the Calico. However, the initial velocity of the .30-06 Springfield is 2.5 times higher than the 9mm bullets, and its destructive power seven times the latter.

Kiritsugu had completely seen through the speed of Volumen Hydrargyrum, which came from pressure. Although a blob of mercury can quickly spread out into a membrane faster than a bullet through hydraulic pressure, it is impossible to quickly go back to a blob from a membrane using pressure alone. That is the limit of hydrodynamics.

Therefore, when another sudden massive force is launched against it, the mercury can't react quickly and form a powerful defense –

A big hole was punched right through the mirror-smooth surface of the mercury membrane. Judging from Kayneth's wails inside, the Springfield bullet has hit the target.

However, he couldn't even aim at the target hidden behind obstructions. Therefore, it was already lucky for him to hit the other man; he couldn't at all expect this attack to give the other a fatal wound.

Kayneth's wails also quickly turned into angry curses, then –

"Scalp!"

Following a roar full of the intent to kill, the mercury unleashed a killing move.

Kiritsugu faced the silver whips roaring towards him with ease. He didn’t even need to activate Innate Time Control this time. There were more than ten meters between him and Kayneth now. Such a far distance was more than enough.

Kiritsugu pulled back just a bit; you can't hit what you can't reach, and the mercury blade only managed to cut the hem of his flowing coat.

Volumen Hydrargyrum’s characteristics can be grasped by just observing its attacks once. Despite being a very fast attack, it is comparatively simple.

When mercury is in the shape of a whip it is the base that controls its extremely quick attacks, but the tip virtually has no power. The power of the blade is basically formed through centrifugal force. For someone as experienced as Kiritsugu in melee combat, the path this kind of attacks would take is easy to predict. This is also the characteristics of controlling mercury with pressure. Only parts with a large mass can fully exert its power, while the strength slowly gets weaker towards the tip end. Kiritsugu had already analyzed this weakness of its when he realized the mercury ends that stretched far from the original mass to search for enemies aren’t as agile as the cutting whips.

Kiritsugu was running before the opponent could continue to attack. It’d be great if the opponent began to chase him immediately, but if the other man didn’t chase him and stopped instead to treat the gun wound, he’s just received, then that means the previous taunt still wasn’t enough.

The blow that penetrated the protective membrane was the first and the last. Volumen Hydrargyrum’s defense would become firmer once it realizes the Contender’s power, which is completely different from that of the Calico. In future attacks, all forms of defense should be able to block the Springfield bullet as well. Kayneth would certainly utilize all his prana to strengthen the mercury’s defense.

It wouldn’t be good if he didn't do that.

Kiritsugu, enduring the pain enveloping his body, opened the Contender's chamber and pulled out the empty cartridge as he ran. This time, he slipped in a magecraft bullet.

Kayneth would definitely utilize all the prana he has in his body to anticipate Kiritsugu’s next strike. The previous strike was conducted using the normal bullet just to entice him to be alert.

If things go according to plan – Kayneth is digging himself the greatest of graves. All that's left is to find the way to shove him in and bury him with Kiritsugu's own hands.

The Magus Killer's "hunt" is about to reach its climax.

Act 7

Act 7.

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Reminiscing, this is the first time she felt uneasy since Irisviel stepped onto the grounds of Fuyuki.

She realizes once again the importance of Saber, who remained by her side constantly. The quiet confidence and tolerance emanating from her lithe frame gave Irisviel much assurance.

It was not that Hisau Maiya, Saber’s replacement to accompany her is untrustworthy as a guard; Kiritsugu also held Maiya’s abilities in high regards, and she is not being suspicious of her.

So, what is the reason for this strange anxiousness?

Leaving the castle due to a strategic retreat, there was absolutely no dialogue between the two walking in the forest of the bounded field. True, Maiya didn’t seem to be the type who enjoyed banter, but her complete silence seemed too heavy for Irisviel.

Would Maiya answer if she is spoken to first? Trying once probably won’t do much harm. Currently, the two are within a safe zone, isolated from battle and not in a precarious situation where quietness needed to be maintained.

If so, then she is going to gather her courage and open her mouth – but because she didn't know what to say, Irisviel once again checked herself forcefully.

The things she wanted to ask were piled as high as mountains. Meeting Kiritsugu; memories of time spent with him. Kiritsugu's integrity in Maiya's eyes… no matter what the question is she wanted to know the answer. But Irisviel felt hesitant to ask any one of them.

Hisau Maiya knew the Kirtsugu she did not know.

If the answer coming from Maiya's mouth had enough force to shatter the image of her husband in Irisviel's heart –

No, such a thing is impossible. There is no evidence to deny it in such a way. For Irisviel, the short span of nine years since their initial meeting was the whole of Kiritsugu.

The silence continued as her mind circled about irritably. Though the atmosphere was clearly awkward, Maiya continued to move as she ignored it completely.

"– Clearly, I am not apt at handling this woman –"

As she hung her head and sighed deeply, a warning flashed inside Irisviel's head.

"--!?"

With a face full of surprise, Maiya looked at Irisviel, whose whole body suddenly stiffened.

"What's the matter, madam?"

"… Another new intruder. Slightly ahead of our position. We'll meet if we continue onward."

The situation was only to be expected. Maiya nodded calmly.

"Then, let us slowly loop around. It will be very safe if we looped from here towards the north."

"……"

Irisviel, concentrating in her current efforts to scry on the invader with the magecraft of 'clairvoyance', did not respond immediately.

Clad in pitch-black vestments, the tall figure was intimidating. His short hair and serious demeanor appear exactly like the photographs found in the resources that Kiritsugu collected.

“… It’s Kirei Kotomine.”

Compared to her statement, Irisviel is more surprised by the change in Maiya’s expression as she made her report.

Always icy and expressionless, she is a woman whose emotions are impossible for anyone to detect. She had thought previously that Maiya’s heart must have been truly cold and cruel to her core -

This is the first time Irisviel saw Maiya’s “expression”. It was crisscrossed with anxiety and fury. What she saw was completely different from fear, but a sense of apprehension. Her fear was probably not Kirei, but instead the fact that Kirei appeared in such a situation.

As she detects this point, Irisviel understood. Though the process was brusque, Irisiviel, however, finally understood the mind of Hisau Maiya.

“Miss Maiya, the orders you accepted from Kiritsugu is to ensure my safety, correct?”

“Correct, but –”

“But what? You’re thinking “this is the only man whom I cannot allow to interfere with Kiritsugu”, right?”

Smiling slyly, Irisviel pointed out her thoughts. Maiya was temporarily rendered speechless.

“Madam, you… “

“Incidentally, I have the exact same opinion as you.”

Kirei Kotomine. The man who is probably the greatest threat to Kiritsugu. Maiya’s response upon merely hearing his name makes it self-evident.

Even though Irisviel was a homunculus, she fell in love, fulfilled that sentiment and even became a mother. Thus, she obtained the sixth sense that humans have but homunculi can never understand – that is, “a woman’s intuition.”

“Let the two of us stop Kirei here. Is that alright, Miss Maiya?

After a brief moment of hesitation, Maiya nodded her head with a strange expression on her face.

“My deepest apologies. But please prepare yourself, madam.”

“No problems. Don’t worry about me. You carry out your task. Not the orders Kiritsugu gave, but act on the things you think are necessary.”

“Yes.”

Come to think of it, perhaps she had already suspected. That was why she was afraid to confirm it.

Now, Irisviel understood. The reason why she’s been avoiding Maiya… was not that she was afraid of her, but she was afraid to know her heart.

She was afraid of the truth that she “wasn’t the only woman who cares about Emiya Kiritsugu”.

Irisviel cannot help but to laugh in the exultation that came with the approaching deathmatch. Pulling out her Calico submachine gun, Maiya gave her a glance of surprise.

“– What’s the matter?”

“The human heart is truly an amazing thing.”

Gambling her life for Kiritsugu – the fact that there is another woman with such determination other than herself.

Clearly, the answer is supposed to be shocking. However, now – such a truth made her feel infinitely at ease.

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For Kirei Kotomine, it is not difficult for him to assess Irisviel’s side and their plan of action.

All the other masters are setting Caster as their target, while Caster has his eyes set on Saber. Therefore, there was no need for specific movements. The best strategy is to make complete preparations to confront an attack in the home base and wait for the opponents to arrive.

Therefore, there was no need for a search. The Einzbern Forest in the wilderness of Fuyuki – it should not be unused at this time. Emiya Kiritsugu should still be there.

Of course, Kirei never planned to enter battle himself. There was a high chance of the eastern side of the forest becoming a major battleground. It would make sense for their enemies from Fuyuki to attack from that direction.

Thus, Kirei hung around the western edges, waiting for battle to be joined. He also hedged his bets on the chance that – if battle really started on the eastern side as he predicted, then he can launch a surprise attack on the castle from its opposite direction.

He released Assassin into the forest as scouts in spirit form. With the ability of “presence concealment”, Assassin is able to enter the bounded field without being detected. Though they cannot go near the castle, they were still able to observe the battle around the outer rim of the forest.

And – as predicted, the battle between Caster and Saber begun on the eastern side of the forest. What’s more, and lucky for Kirei, Einzbern only engaged with the Servant alone, while the Master remained hidden behind closed gates. Assassin’s report was an excellent opportunity for Kirei.

If Kiritsugu was hired by Einzbern to be a hunting dog, then he should be guarding the Master who was defenseless and isolated from her Servant. Now it’s an excellent chance for Kirei to force them into a dead end.

Even though Assassin immediately alerted him to the fact that Lord El-Melloi was also advancing towards the castle, Kirei did not hesitate. Instead, he felt anxious. If Kiritsugu died by Kayneth’s hand, then it would be impossible for Kirei to complete his purpose. Thus, Kirei prepared for the worst-case scenario of being forced to confront Kayneth and advanced rapidly in the forest.

Also, depending on situation, there was also a possibility of Einzbern abandoning the castle in order to escape. Thus, it is obvious that the path of retreat will be the direction away from the eastern battlefield where the Servants were currently battling. If that happened, then there was a good chance of encountering Kirei.

Just to be safe, Kirei began his battle preparations early – As such, he reacted dexterously to the unexpected murderous intent.

Within half a breath he ducked and dodged a hailstorm of bullets, which howled above his head like thunder. Sometimes, even veterans of many

battles would lose morale and judgment capabilities when surprised by a machine gun. However, such events are mere exceptions to the Executioners of the Holy Church. Kirei didn't even break a sweat as he analyzed the situation calmly.

There is a single opponent present. Judging from the sound of gunfire, it was a submachine gun with a barrel width under 9mm. Because the handgun bullets lacked the ability to penetrate tree trunks, its threat level was significantly lower than that of the sniper rifle in the forest.

Inferring the opponent's position through the location of the gunfire, Kirei threw two Black Keys. However, contrary to expected results, he only heard the sounds of blades piercing tree trunks.

"…Mm?"

The murderous edge of the kill returned to raid him, flanking the surprised Kirei.

Once more, the sound of gunfire appeared. This time from his left. Though he dodged it at the last second, this volley was considerably more dangerous than the volley above. The conclusion he previously reached concerning the enemy consisting of only one person slightly slowed his reaction.

The position of the second gunshot was completely different. It was too fast for movement. Although, if there were two gunners from the start, it was entirely possible to take out Kirei if a coordinated crossfire was used.

Amidst his confusion, he sensed again four more presences. Kirei quickly placed two black keys in each hand, four black keys in total and positioned himself as new sensations flashed in his brain.

"That means – an illusion?"

It wasn't impossible. He was deep into the forest's bounded field. A bounded field includes illusion. In addition, if there was a magus present who could control illusions, it was entirely possible to cause delusions to the lone target, Kirei.

Was the unseen sniper really just a single person? Does this mean the one who controlled the illusion was the same? Or does this mean that there was someone else responsible for support…

Regardless, before the discovery of a counter to the illusion, he could only follow his opponent's tempo. Kirei pulled out four black keys, throwing them simultaneously towards the four directions.

-As anticipated, there was no sign of contact anywhere.

Kirei, annoyed at the fruitless endeavor exhibited his frustration. At the same time, the bullet scored a direct hit on his back.

The third gunshot had even no scent that he could sense. That is to say, the first two attacks were designed feints in order to confuse Kirei. In theory, if an illusionary trap could control fake hints of murderous intents, it should be also possible to seal the true killing intent behind it.

Without even time to howl in pain the tall, robed figure fell face first, his feet tangled. There was neither a twitch nor moans of pain.

Has she pierced the spine and killed him instantly? Maiya, deducting as such, stood up from her sniping location as she pointed the Calico at the prone Kirei and approached him cautiously.

"- Miss Maiya, no!"

Irisviel, sensing a trap, shouted a warning. But it was too late.

Kirei, maintaining his position, did not stand up. Instead, he threw a hidden Black Key with a single swing of his arms. From the lower trajectory, the black key ripped apart Maiya's right calf, taking away her opportunity for the next action.

Like a spring, Kirei mechanically leapt as he suddenly charged toward Maiya. Fearlessly, Maiya pressed the trigger.

But Kirei only protected his head; he didn't bother dodging. Even the sleeves of the monk's robes were made from thick Kevlar filaments. It was covered seamlessly with the Church's special protection spells. 9mm caliber pistol rounds, even at extremely close distances, cannot pierce it. Even then, the strikes from 250 foot-pound bullets, firing at 10 rounds per second, struck Kirei's body like metal bats. However, he was able to completely protect his organs and bones because of his well-trained musculature that acted like armor.

Sensing that Kirei was bulletproof from head to top, Maiya immediately tossed the Calico and pulled out the combat knife located near her thigh. Kevlar, though protective against gunshots, was very vulnerable to the

cutting of a sharp blade. If her gun was useless, she could only survive through melee combat.

As the hailstorm of bullets stopped, Kirei pulled out another pair of Black Keys with his hands. He slashed at Maiya with a cross shaped movement. Except, Maiya was not slowed in the slightest by her wounded right foot, and she deflected the continuous strikes of the Black keys with her heavy dagger.

Even though the edge of the Black Key was far longer than the dagger, it was still a modified throwing weapon. In close combat the Black Key, due to its extreme length, lacked balance; Maiya's large dagger, due to its versatile nature, possessed overwhelming advantage.

"Victory is still possible ---!"

Maiya suddenly charged forward in what seemed to be a half-suicidal move. The Black Keys should have a very difficult time defending against such an attack, and even if she was struck in retaliation, the chances of being seriously wounded were low.

With the Black Key in his right hand, Kirei blocked Maiya's dagger hand for hand. Perhaps he was relying on the length of the blade for a counterattack – the crisscrossed blade's shadow lunged forward, its edge poised to strike.

Maiya, foreseeing the attack, easily dodged the counterattack. Simply moving her head, a little, the tip of the Black Key missed her as she barged into her opponent's embrace.

Yet, just when Maiya believed that victory was at hand, her gaze was drawn to Kirei's unusual movements.

The point to a crisscrossing counterattack is that the crossed hands – the right hand, where Kirei should have held the Black Key was empty. As he lunged forward, he abandoned his weapon.

That is to say, Kirei's right hand never had the intention of using the Black Key to pierce Maiya in the first place -

Like a clamp, the veiny fingers grabbed Maiya's right hand.

Snakelike, the tall black robe twisted his body deftly, and dived beneath Maiya's right arm. In the next instant, as if supporting someone who is wounded, Kirei carried Maiya's right arm with the back of his shoulder.

The exorcist who wielded the Black Keys – she was fooled by her prejudiced first impression. In deadly despair, the helpless Maiya finally understood. This movement is Chinese Kungfu, Bhaji Quan. At the same time Kirei's side pressed close to Maiya's waist. Using his left elbow to land a blow at Maiya's heart as simultaneously, a brilliant strike from his left foot struck Maiya's supporting leg.

An amazing completion of "Six grand opening – elbow up thrust." As he grabbed the hand holding the dagger, all the actions are completed in an instant. A combo worthy of the soul of Ba ji Quan – combining offense and defense.

Maiya could not even move as she fell heavily to the ground. Due to the extreme level of impact, the paralyzed Maiya thought she had dislocated both her arms and legs. Subconsciously, she could only feel the sharp pain in her chest after it had been struck by the elbow. She probably had broken two, or three ribs.

Even though a single strike was capable of disabling Maiya. Kirei, however, was satisfied. Since now he knew Kiritsugu's location, Kirei did not need to grant her any mercy. As he clenched his fist – ready to deliver the death-blow – at that time, he saw something that made him doubt his eyes.

The embarrassed Maiya was also surprised. It was already agreed upon, that prior to battling Kirei, Irisviel will only be supporting her from a hidden location. But she – Irisviel, who, except for magic, should have no other type of self-defense gently floated from the bushes and stood facing Kirei.

"Madam, no!"

Now, Maiya tossed away all her fears and embarrassment. To her, compared to her own danger, more serious question was the threat now to Irisviel.

If Kiritsugu were to lose his wife now – as someone who swore to protect him, there can be no danger that's more despairing.

To Kirei, this situation was hard to comprehend.

He knew that Irisiviel and her family were not apt at using combat magic due to their specialization in alchemy. During the previous three Heaven's Feels, they were helplessly defeated during the first rounds. Perhaps, that was also the reason for these northern magi being nearly useless in actual combat. Judging from the fact that they found the mercenary Kiritsugu, they must have reflected upon the issue.

Thus, in the situation where the female protector lay fallen on the ground, isn't this most unlikely situation - the fact that the Einzbern family's Master appearing alone in front of Kirei?

Kirei was fairly certain that the silver-haired maiden in front of him was Saber's master. If she dies, then the Einzbern camp will undoubtedly be defeated.

This woman should be the key piece that must escape no matter what the cost is.

"Woman, you may be surprised, but my reason for coming here is not to defeat you."

Before the enemy Master, the statement is equivalent to abandoning battle. Even though it is unlikely that his opponent will believe him, at least Kirei made the attempt to negotiate. This new developing was too far from what he had hoped for – meeting with Kiritsugu on the battlefield was his real goal. Compared to that goal, the situation of the Heaven's Feel can only play second fiddle.

Of course, he didn't expect his opponents to believe his words -

"I understand, Kirei Kotomine."

-Because he did not anticipate the belief of the opposition. The silver-haired maiden's reply only made Kirei more confused.

"I know why you're here. Although, this is not negotiable. You cannot reach Kiritsugu…We will stop you. Here."

"……"

To Irisviel, it was a good thing that the exorcist looked confused. The opponent clearly underestimated her, and his carelessness was her chance at victory. Perhaps, he knew the specialty behind Einzbern's magic, and figured out that she was not a combat magician.

Irisviel pulled out the "secret weapon" hidden in her large sleeves. At first glance, it was no magic, but rather an unreliable item. A soft and thin metallic bouquet of wires dangled lightly between her fingers.

"Madam, this man is an executor – an expert magus hunter! This is not an opponent that can be faced with only magic!"

Maiya, suppressing her pain, screamed on the ground. In response, Irisviel only smiled quietly.

"What I learned from Kiritsugu, isn't limited to operating a car!"

As Maiya watched speechlessly and Kirei observed in surprise, Irisviel poured mana into the metallic threads. The thin threads became unraveled and moved between Irisviel hands like a living organism.

Kirei’s understanding was half correct. The Einzbern family possessed magic that was designed to forge, create, and more importantly, use matter. Kiritsugu could not have taught her any offensive magic. Originally, if one went solely by magical ability, Irisviel was far superior to her husband. Thus, Kiritsugu could not have taught her magic.

What he taught her was not how the homunculus lived. Rather, it was to use tears, laughter, joy and anger to sing about life – the meaning of the term “to live.”

In addition, he also taught her the determining to “live on.”

Kirei’s understanding was also half-wrong. Irisviel already had a method of turning her magic into offensive purposes as a “battle” state. It was something she learned from her husband, who always lived for battle – if she was to “live on” with him, she must face the test of “survival” one day. Thus, she will also need to face battle.

“Shape ist Leben!” (From German: "Shape is life!") [Furigana translation: "Shape, conceive life!"]

Through two small chants, weaving the magic in one breath. The control of metallic shapes was Irisiviel’s true skill.

This secret was peerless.

The silvery thread crisscrossed as it drew into complex shapes. It crisscrossed, combined, like a weaved piece of art as it took on a complex solid shape. Using a giant eagle as base, it appeared as an intricate silvery work of art.

The silvery thread crisscrossed as it drew into complex shapes. It crisscrossed, combined, like a weaved piece of art as it took on a complex solid shape. Possessing fierce wings and beaks, and sharp claws. Using a giant eagle as base, it appeared as an intricate silvery work of art.

No, wait, this was not a mere framework-

“Kyeeeee!!”

Like the sound of a metallic blade scratching, the eagle made out of silver threads screeched and flew from Irisviel's hands. It was created by an alchemy-using homunculus on the spot. It was a “weapon” given life by Irisviel, whose fate hangs in the balance.

The bullet-like flight far surpassed Kirei’s imagination. Surprised, he dodged the attack, but the razor-sharp beak still brushed past his nose.

As the first strike missed, the silver thread eagle started to circle above Kirei’s head. This time, both claws dashed downward. The target was Kirei’s face. Although, for an executor, this battle was not simply defensive. Fearless of the sharpness of those claws, he struck at the eagle with a powerful strike from his fist.

The sharply descending eagle could not change its flight path. The fist landed a clear blow on the abdomen of the eagle.

“Mm!?”

Yet, Kirei was the one who was surprised. As the eagle was struck by his fist, it changed into shapeless silver thread and wrapped around his right fist like vines.

Immediately, he pulled with his left hand, but the silver thread also trapped the other one. Only moments ago, the silver thread flew with an eagle’s shape in the air, but now, like handcuffs, it tightly trapped Kirei’s hands.

“…. Hm.”

Yet, as an executor, Kirei has fought countless magi to the death. Only grunting lightly, he charged towards Irisviel. It didn’t matter if his hands were trapped – as long as he delivered a kick up close, the battle would be decided.

“Too naïve!”

Irisviel scolded as she poured more mana into the silver threads.

Not even Kirei can hold out this time. As he lost his balance, the silver threads wrapped around the tree tightly and pulled Kirei towards it. Finally, it bound him firmly towards the tree trunk

The grown tree was more than 30 cm thick. Even if Kirei wanted to use his outrageous strength, it was impossible for him to break or uproot the tree. At last, he was completely immobile.

And even then, Irisviel was the one who steadily lost her advantage underneath Kirei's strength. In theory, Kirei's hands should have been overpowered by the pressure generated by the silver thread. Yet, his muscles were trained to the point where they appeared steel-like, and they were powerful beyond all belief. Her silvery thread almost broke, as they struggled underneath the saturated state of near collapse. In order to keep it tight and to prevent the metal from breaking, she must constantly use her mana to maintain it.

"…Maiya-san…. hurry!"

The key to victory – was the still-prone Maiya. She was the only one who could give Kirei a final blow. As long as she stayed out of the range of his kicks, a simple shot to the exposed head was enough. For Kirei, it was impossible for him to cover his head with his sleeves like before.

As she received a momentary respite, the injured Maiya recovered sensation in her hands and feet. Moaning in pain from her broken ribs, she moved slowly to the abandoned Calico.

Victory or defeat is a battle of willpower measured by seconds – even though she clenched her teeth in pain from the magical backlash, Irisviel still encouraged herself.

Maiya picking up the gun to fire; as long as she can keep the thread's strength to that point, it would be good. Then, they could eliminate Kirei Kotomine, the greatest threat to Kiritsugu.

It could be said that the two women still mistakenly underestimated the terror that is the Executor of the Church.

With no knowledge of Chinese Kungfu, Irisviel thought that it was only necessary to bind Kirei's hands to render him helpless. It was not her fault that she only thought like that. However, for someone who managed to reach the level of training such as Kirei, the entire body is a weapon. For example, if he only planted both feet on the ground…

"BOOM," the deafening sound rendered Irisviel speechless.

The tree trunk shook erratically. As if struck by a full-powered fist. That means the sound she was hearing – only someone using his full strength to strike at the center of the tree could make that sort of sound.

The clear strike sounded again. This time, she started to doubt her ears. She heard a chilling sound of breakage.

She could not see the situation, but Irisviel understood through the touch of her silver thread. The tree trunk that bound Kirei had large cracks in it. The cracks were next to the part where the silver thread wrapped around – the spot directly below Kirei's hands.

Kirei, with the back of his hands pressing against the bark, was striking at the tree trunk with all of his strength.

Irisviel could not have known – but the strength from a martial arts master is not merely produced from the wrist. From the strength of the feet on the ground, the turning of the back, and the twisting of shoulders, it was possible to instantaneously release a burst of power in the fists. To an expert in this phenomenon, the strength of the arm was insignificant in comparison to the power of the whole body. If it was necessary, one can press the first next to the target and strike simply by virtue of the "force" coming from outside of the arm – this is known as the hidden technique of "explosive force."

The sound of the third strike shook the forest. In comparison to the time before, this was much stronger. The tree trunk groaned one last time as the broken fibers broke with loud cracks. As the supporting point of the silvery thread, the trunk collapsed. Grabbing the thread with both of his hands, Kirei nonchalantly escaped the silvery ring at the point of collapse and pulled the thread apart link by link.

Irisviel knelt instantly as she felt the powerful backlash from the breaking of her magic. Calmly stepping forward in the manner of a victorious conqueror, Kirei looked into the despairing eyes of the two women and strode to the Calico, easily crushing its wooden frame with his hammerlike feet.

"Bastard……"

Still not being able to stand back up, prostrate, Maiya moaned viciously. After throwing at her an extremely bored glance, with the tip of his foot, Kirei casually kicked her at the stomach. As if sobbing convulsively, after Maiya fainted in agony and rolled over, she was perfectly still this time.

And then, with a look that lacked any expression, this time his gaze was laid on Irisviel.

-130:32:40

The battlefield of the Heroic Spirits had already turned into a swamp full of filthy mud.

The horde of alien demonic monsters which appeared endlessly regardless of how many were slaughtered; piled into mountains of corpses, the spraying innards and bodily fluids mixed, was kicked and stirred by two pairs of feet, and formed a chaos even more terrifying than Hell itself.

More rancid that the stench of rot, the smell of the demonic monsters' internal organs was thick as mist and filled the air - just like lethal poisonous gas. Living humans will probably die from lung corrosion just from inhaling.

By now, the number of enemies cut down by Saber and Lancer had long surpassed five hundred.

"...To make no progress at all for this long, this is a surprise beyond amazement."

Although Lancer had yet to show signs of tiredness, his muttering was full of bitterness.

The tide of battle cannot be determined. Despite facing the might of two knight class Servants, the number of alien demons still didn't decrease, being summoned again and again to fill the gaps in the encircling horde.

"It's that grimoire, Lancer. As long as his Noble Phantasm is here… this situation won't change."

"I see, so that's what it is."

Lancer gave a depressed sigh after he heard Saber's muttered words.

"But, if we want to remove the book from the weakling's hands, we have to break through this wall of minions no matter what."

The demonic monsters grouped together and approached them slowly as they waved their tentacles mockingly. Perhaps these alien creatures do not feel fear of death or pain. As if feeling that happiness only come from being slaughtered, they endlessly attacked the two Servants.

Even now, facing both Saber and Lancer, Caster continues his battle of attrition. If this is his strategy, it would obviously promise him victory. The

amount of prana wielded by Caster and his Noble Phantasm might as well be infinite.

"...Lancer, at this desperate time, do you want to make a gamble?"

"Although it annoys me to appear outlasted, playing with his minions like this will accomplish nothing.

Fine. I accept, Saber."

After Lancer's ready consent, Saber stared at the repulsive wall of flesh which stretched back to Caster, carefully calculating its thickness and density.

This is her greatest secret skill - intuition told her this idea is 'correct', and worth putting all her stakes into.

"I'll open the way. There is only one chance. Lancer, *can you run with the wind*?"

"Hm? – Hehe, so that's what it is. Simply done."

Despite Saber's puzzling words, Lancer nodded with a smile.

Although it was only once, they were enemies who fought with their lives on the line. Both of them have etched into their memory all the secret techniques the other used. Even without an explanation, Lancer could understand the skills and intentions of Servant Saber.

"What are you quietly mumbling about? Your dying prayers, perhaps?"

Caster mocked the two Servants calmly and evenly. Right now, it wasn't him who was fighting Saber and Lancer, but his Noble Phantasm, Prelate's Spellbook. Caster was like the audience observing the battle from outside the ring. For him to elegantly and composedly taunt his opponents and get on their nerves is enough to be considered an 'attack'.

"Feel the terror. Feel the despair! There is a limit to the 'difference in numbers' that brute force can overcome. Hahaha, it's humiliating, isn't it? To be crushed and suffocated by these ignoble, nameless evils! For heroes, there is nothing more humiliating than this!"

Even awashed by her opponent's joyful scorn, Saber, emotionless and unfaltering, merely wielded the sword in her right hand with a decisive and calm expression.

Those unwavering eyes were only staring at – the victory that must be obtained.

"Ha-ha, that beautiful face... now twist in agony for me, Jeanne!"

Giiiiiiii!

The horde of demonic monsters roared together. They surged towards the center of their ring for the kill as they made alien strange sounds, indistinguishable as joy or hatred.

Now it would be – the time to decide who will become the victor.

With a loud voice, the King of Knights commanded the noble holy sword.

"Strike Air!"

In the middle of the whirling air, the resplendent brilliance of gold shone through.

The sheath of super-high-pressured air that protected the holy sword was released from the bondage of the invisible barrier – bellowing forth like a savage dragon's roar.

The secret sword technique that guaranteed the kill. It is a different way to use the Noble Phantasm Invisible Air. Last night in the battle against Lancer she released this extreme air pressure to accelerate quickly. If it was released towards the enemy it would become a tempest, a crushing hammer that blows away entire armies.

Thoughtlessly packed together, the demonic beasts took the blow all the harder. The super-high-pressure tempest, compacted like a solid force, smashed the demonic monsters to smithereens, mixing the minced flesh together with gravel and broken wood. It was as if an invisible giant hand swept across the entire earth and opened up a dead straight path. The instant they were blown apart by the air pressure, a perfect hole appeared in the demonic monsters' ranks.

The destructive power of Strike Air was countered by the many layers of demonic monsters, reduced to a strong gust of wind that merely blew at the ends of Caster’s robe when it reached him.

The penetrated gap would serve as a path. However, against the density of the demonic monsters summoned, it could only count as a temporary opening that could be sealed off immediately.

"What - ?!"

Even so, Caster still made a sound of shock. It wasn't just the blow of wind which penetrated the ranks.

When objects move extremely quickly in the atmosphere, they are capable of tearing apart the air in front of them, while leaving a vacuum behind. Of course, that vacuum would draw in the surrounding air, and become a surge that follows the object which passed through it. There are techniques in auto racing that allow cars to follow right behind the car in front of it, using that 'slipstream' to accelerate faster.

The air pressure resulting from the release of Saber's Invisible Air triggered a similar phenomenon. It created a vacuum behind the passing gale at the same time it destroyed the army of demonic monsters and prepared a point of in-rushing air.

Then, the one who sprang into this converging surge without hesitation was the one who was waiting for this one strike – Lancer.

"Come - prepare yourself!"

It was an ultimate skill that not only demanded superhuman physique, but complete synchronization with his partner. However, Lancer achieved this miraculous combination with watching his enemy Saber using the secret sword of wind for just once.

With one leap Lancer passed through the passage twirling with gales of blood and flesh, like a swallow that tucked in its feathered wings by its side as it chased the wind. When his feet once again touched earth, he was barely ten strides away from Caster, with no obstructing barriers between them.

"I have you, Caster!"

"Ahhh!?"

The demonic monsters that turned around due to their master's crisis stretched their tentacles together towards Lancer's back. But Lancer didn't turn back. He brandished the short spear in his left hand behind him like a windmill to cut down the pursuing attacks, while he turned half his body and approached Caster with the long spear in his right hand extended.

He was just short of the killing blow. The long spear's strike only resulted in the tip cutting slightly into the surface and didn't make a serious tear.

But the Noble Phantasm in the enchanting spearman's hand was such a weapon that would decide the victor on the battlefield even with such a slight touch.

"Gouge, Gáe Dearg!"

His growl was followed by a crimson stab. The tip of the spear did not touch Caster's fragile body – but the cover of the grimoire in his hand.

That is the red spearhead which once penetrated Saber's Invisible Air and canceled out her magical armor. It is a fatal "Noble Phantasm killer", capable of severing all ties of prana. For Caster, who completely relied on the mighty power of the grimoire to summon demonic monsters to manipulate, it was a decisive blow equal to a checkmate.

"Boom", a sound akin to waves breaking against rocks beside the sea echoed in the forest.

The countless alien demonic monsters on the ground all liquefied in the blink of an eye. The demonic monsters, which were originally created from the flesh and blood of the sacrifices, changed back into blood and scattered away. They lost the power to materialize into being the moment the prana supply from Prelate's Spellbook was terminated.

Within the rapidly retreating Caster's hands, the grimoire immediately activated its ability as a prana furnace and quickly regenerated the damaged cover. The prana was only cut off during the brief moment when Gáe Dearg's blade was in contact with the grimoire; the spear had no power to damage the Noble Phantasm itself. However, once canceled, the magecraft can't be salvaged. Even if he wanted to repeat the summoning spell, Saber and Lancer's holy sword and twin spears wouldn't give him the time either.

"You bastard- BASTARD bastard BASTARD BASTARD BASTARD BASTARDDDDDD!!"

Faced with such a desperate situation, Caster's expression twisted until his eyes were rolled to the back of his head and he raged while foaming around the mouth. Lancer nonchalantly gave the smile of a rascal that he was born with.

"How was that? Now that Saber's taken back her 'left hand', this is something that can be done with just lifting her little finger."

But Saber wasn't in the mood to joke like Lancer.

Until the moment victory is decided, the only thing that echoed in her mind were the final screams and tears that the children gave out as they were torn apart and cruelly slaughtered.

"...You had better prepare yourself, heretic."

The King of Knights muttered in a quiet sound of anger as she lifted the golden holy sword with her right hand. The sword tip was pointed straight towards Caster.

-130:32:31

Anger, like acid, was eating away at Kayneth drop by drop.

He is a first-rate magus. He would never lose his composure due to emotions, especially when facing a situation when he is fighting for his life.

Actually, if this is a duel of secret craft between first-rate magi colleagues, Kayneth wouldn’t be harboring things like anger at all. He would probably admire and acknowledge the opponent’s ability, calmly analyzing its true value, and concentrate in performing his magecraft that would serve as a proper reply for the enemy’s craft. Those noble and flamboyant, gentlemanly games are what Kayneth knew as ‘battles. With the right to use the Holy Grail at stake, he aimed to compete with Tōsaka Tokiomi, Matō Zōken, and four other unknown yet outstanding opponents, and arrived at this desolate place at the farthest east.

However – the pain of the wound on his right shoulder throbbed and invaded his senses as if mocking Kayneth, continuing the pain as if it was humiliating him.

This isn’t a wound taken in battle. Those things – are never fit to be called "battles".

It was as if he stepped on a piece of rotten floorboard. As if he tipped over a steaming pot. As if his best suit got stained with mud.

The opponent is as insignificant as an ant, not worthy to be called an enemy. A piece of rubbish that even seeing it would make him feel dirty and unpleasant.

To feel "anger" at something like that, and risk his pride as Lord El-Melloi, would be unthinkable.

These things are just daily hassles. Something close to being bitten by a stray dog.

It was just bad luck. Dismiss it as a simple misfortune.

Even as he tried to convince himself in this way – he screamed at the pain of the wound on his shoulder. The severe pain that felt like he was slowly being burnt tormented him and ate away at his pride.

Kayneth’s icy cold face was as expressionless as a mask, not loudly swearing or gritting his teeth. For an observer, that is definitely not the expression of someone in anger.

Indeed. He didn’t hate anyone. All his anger was directed inwards. It was merely that he was provoked by a situation that surprised him – something that is impossible, unreasonable.

Impossible –

The rage that had nowhere to go became destructive impulses that spread to Volumen Hydrargyrum. Kayneth smashed the walls of the corridors around him with his whips of blades.

That base scum made me bleed... impossible! It shouldn’t have happened!

His walk resembling a sleepwalker, Kayneth pursued Emiya Kiritsugu, who had fled. The shapeless mercury lump, taking the place of its master’s heart, followed him, full of murderous intent.

The door that blocked his way wasn’t pushed open but smashed apart by the mercury's weight.

Be it flower vases, paintings, or elegant furniture: all the decorations that happen to fall into his sight are smashed and destroyed.

There were many traps along the way. Wires tripped by Kayneth's defenseless feet, or a fuse in the carpet that when stepped on would cause a pre-set grenade to explode or a mine to throw out shrapnel. At those times, the mercury protective membrane would expand immediately and rush forward to block it.

Those set traps were like toys made to fool children, so ridiculous that Kayneth wanted to laugh. But the sound of his laughter was at the same

time mocking Kayneth, who was hurt by those tricks that were like toys made to fool children.

Self-mockery cut into pride like a razor. That humiliation inflamed the anger in his heart even more.

Lord El-Melloi’s admirable Mystic Code isn’t something that is made for this kind of foolish tricks. His mercury should be a weapon that takes in Gandr shots, deflects magical swords, and breaks through supernatural fire, ice and lightning. It should be a craft that makes whichever magus who hates him marvel, revere, and at the same time arrive at death.

Then, what would his current distasteful situation be?

The opponent that he unleashed his proud Mystic Code to chase is nothing more than an anonymous mouse... Every passing second was making him feel humiliated. The wound on his shoulder was hurting worse and worse.

An endless hysterical downward spiral – however, that had also come into sight of its conclusion.

No matter how big the castle may be, the possibilities of escape become limited if one runs upwards. The mouse finally got chased to the end of the corridors in the third floor. The stream of mercury that Kayneth sent out earlier to find the enemy accurately located him this time. Looks like the target had set himself to stay firmly where he is. He should have decided to have the final confrontation with Kayneth at that place.

Confrontation – as that word floated into Kayneth’s mind, he couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

Seems like the enemy still hasn’t given up. So that’s how it is. He had wounded Kayneth once, so there should still be a chance of victory if the same luck decided to grace him again. He should have made this final decision with all the spirit of a desperate mouse trying to bite the cat.

"Idiot..."

Kayneth’s tight mouth became twisted with his sneer as he muttered.

It wasn’t because of his skills or outstanding strategies that the mouse managed to touch Kayneth. It was just an unreasonable coincidence. There’s a need to make sure he knows the difference.

Not a confrontation. This is execution. This is slaughter.

Kayneth, as his body filled of his cruel intention to kill, turned the final corner with his Mystic Code and arrived at the end of the corridor.

It basically fitted the setting Emiya Kiritsugu expected. The third confrontation with Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald.

The distance was barely thirty meters. The width of the corridor was just over six meters. There are no places to hide. No place to retreat.

Kayneth’s Volumen Hydrargyrum has potentially fatal speed and power within a radius of seven-and-a-half meters. The initiative remains with Kiritsugu until Kayneth can get in range.

In his left hand – fifty rounds of 9mm bullets in a fresh helical magazine, the Calico waited for the moment to open fire.

And his Mystic Code, the Contender Custom, in his right hand. The "magecraft bullet" was already loaded in the single-shot chamber.

Kiritsugu didn’t show any fear or beg for mercy; he merely stood silently holding two guns. This made Kayneth even more unpleasant and twisted his expression as he uttered mocking jeers.

“You wouldn’t think that the previous method would still work, right? Despicable thing.”

It won’t work. It would be a problem for Kiritsugu if it did work – however, he needn’t tell the other person this. He needed to have Kayneth think that Kiritsugu is stupid enough to repeat the exact same attack.

"I won’t just simply kill you. I’ll only heal your lungs and heart to make them revive, then I’ll slowly deal with you starting from your toes."

Kayneth said sinisterly as he slowly walked towards Kiritsugu step by step. The Volumen Hydrargyrum twirled beside him, flexing its countless whips dauntingly as it shook their sharp tips.

"Die in regret, in pain, in despair. And curse when you die. Curse the cowardice of your employer… the Einzbern Master who humiliated the Holy Grail War!"

Right – Kiritsugu sniggered within his heart as he regarded Kayneth’s proclamation of execution as nothing more than a breeze beside his ear. It seems the Master substitution plan he proposed worked at the end.

Fifteen meters. If he was to make a move, it would be now.

Towards Kayneth, who was looming nearer, Kiritsugu first used the Calico in his left hand, firing a rain of 9mm bullets in full-automatic. It was a completely identical replay of that sneak attack in the first-floor corridor, a pinning attack made to trigger Volumen Hydrargyrum's automatic defense. In order to make it unable to take the following strike by the Contender, this is a feint made to weaken the mercury's defensive membrane.

Of course, Lord El-Melloi would not fall for the same trick twice.

"Fevor, mei sanguis!"

The mercury's defensive form activated immediately, but this time it wasn't a membrane. Volumen Hydrargyrum leapt in front of its master and formed countless spikes from the floor to the ceiling. It was like a thick bamboo forest covered Kayneth's entire body, and at the same time completely blocked all the bullets flying near.

There's no need to use a membrane as defense if he wasn't facing an attack such as flames or mist. Things such as bullets would become harmless as long as it is not allowed to move in a straight line. Thus, using only "columns" to defend would be enough.

Of course, the prana needed to expand the mercury into a mountain of swords isn't even comparable to that used to form a membrane. Every single spike, twirled as thin as a steel wire, had to be equipped with all the strength and malleability to deflect bullets. The automatic defense this time was completed using all the prana Kayneth had in his possession. The inherited Magic Crests of the Archibald family on his shoulders circulated to its ultimate limit, creating extraordinary pain to the practitioner.

It could be said that the defense this time was the true impregnable fortress.

The bullets, hindered by the silver mountain of swords, bounced back and forth in the gaps between the numerous spikes, making raucous metallic noises. Finally, they lost all power and dropped to the ground. Not one of them reached Kayneth's body.

Then, the Contender in Kiritsugu's right hand gave a roar. This is the single-shot bullet that made Kayneth bear his despicable scar the first time it penetrated Volumen Hydrargyrum's defenses, something with far more destructive power than the 9mm bullets.

However, the degree of defense the mercury mountain of swords put up wasn’t even comparable to that of the membrane.

All the spikes closed up together like a Venus flytrap the instant before the killing move touched the mercury spikes and surrounded the bullet. The thick cluster thin spikes became a single giant column in the blink of an eye, completely sealing off the .30-06 Springfield bullet.

Volumen Hydrargyrum, made to interchange forms freely, showed what marvels it can do. The immaculate skill that controlled the magecraft of fluidics to such perfection should indeed be the epitome of this unparalleled craft, fully worthy of the prestigious name of the Archibald house.

The moment he beautifully completed this magecraft he devoted all his skills in – Lord El-Melloi’s destiny also came to its end.

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Even a Master and a Servant, whom had made a contract, have to use communication techniques such as speech to establish a connection between them when they are far away from each other.

But if the two of them are connected with the bondage of the Command Seal, then one party would quickly detect a disturbance in the other’s scent if the other is in a life-threatening crisis.

Therefore, Kayneth’s dire situation swiftly passed to Lancer, who was still in the forest.

"What – !?"

Lancer suddenly turned to gaze at the direction of the Einzbern castle straight after he destroyed Caster’s army of demonic monsters, just when he was prepared to finish off their nemesis with Saber. For the first time, Lancer realized the fact that his Master, whom he thought was observing his battle behind the frontline, had already entered the enemy formation and undertook another battle.

Lancer’s momentary wavering was a god-sent opening for the desperate Caster.

Within Caster’s hand, having already finished regenerating, Prelate’s Spellbook throbbed with torrents of prana. Of course, Saber wouldn’t stand aside and leave the magus’s spells alone.

"Futile struggles!"

Saber wielded her holy sword with her right hand and rushed forward, trying to defeat the enemy before he could complete his incantation.

But Caster wasn’t foolish enough to pronounce incantations in front of a blade. He didn’t speak even one syllable of incantations, just chaotically let out the surge of prana that the Noble Phantasm produced.

Although the previous summoning magecraft was nullified, the pools of blood that stained the ground were still connected to the prana. The uncontrollable prana that spurt out flowed into that mesh of blood, but finally scattered apart without forming any shapes.

"Ku..."

Her sight was blocked off before she got close enough to strike; even Saber didn’t take a rash move and stopped her steps.

Caster didn’t intend to complete the spell to begin with, but forcibly activated a magecraft that was bound to fail. That would be enough in this situation. The blood that didn’t form any summoned monsters immediately boiled and evaporated due to the saturated prana in them, spreading out in all direction as a fog. This is an imprudent skill that could only be used with the enormous amount of prana provided by a Noble Phantasm.

What he expected – was a blinding mist.

Even Caster, overloaded with confidence, deducted that it would be impossible to reverse the situation and arrive at victory at this state. The magus Servant quickly removed materialization in the time while the bloody mist covered Saber and Lancer’s sight. Faced with two of the three knight classes, he didn’t even get to leave a word behind. Swallowing his anger and humiliation, Caster rapidly left the battlefield in spiritual form.

Luckily for Caster, Saber doesn’t have the ability to turn into spirit form and chase him; Lancer, who has that ability, could not chase him due to his master’s crisis.

“Bastard... what unbelievable cowardice.”

Saber muttered in anger as she recalled Invisible Air from the surrounding atmosphere. The refreshing wind immediately blew in from all direction and scattered the filth of the blood mist. When the two Servants regained their field of sight and Invisible Air was recalled to once again conceal the holy sword's form, even Caster's spiritual aura had disappeared, not to mention his physical figure.

"Lancer, what's wrong?"

Regarding the fact that Lancer could easily have chased their enemy but instead let Caster escape, Saber didn't heckle him but just questioned calmly. It was obvious that something happened based on his changed expression.

"My lord is in trouble… Looks like he left me and attacked your headquarters."

Lancer explained hesitantly. Saber also figured what had probably happened and displayed a dejected expression.

Then... everything did happen according to Kiritsugu's plans.

It wasn't what she wanted. It wasn't that she wanted to completely deny the tactic of deception, but the cruel trap that Kiritsugu set is an existence that cannot co-exist with the King of Knights' belief of standing stoically in the battlefield no matter what happens.

"It must be my master's work... Lancer, you should hurry. Go save your lord."

The spearman was at first dumbfounded at Saber's unhesitating urging, but then bowed his head deeply in thanks. For Saber, this decision was the same as going against her own lord. Retain Lancer here so his Master can be killed would be the reasonable choice made to win the Holy Grail War.

But if we continue on this train of thought, then there was no need for Lancer to fight Caster to save Saber from her crisis. He didn't think of himself as stupid then. Therefore, he wouldn't think of Saber, who let him go on his way, as foolish now.

"I am in your debt, King of Knights."

"It's all right. We swore to have a duel between knights. Let's hold on to that glory till the end."

Lancer nodded briefly, then disappeared into spirit form. Just like that, he galloped towards the castle in the depth of the forest as a whirl of wind.

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When the Emiya family of the previous generation determined the "Origin" of their son and heir, at a loss they named him "Kiritsugu" due to the strange results.

Basically, he possesses the dual attributes of "Fire" and "Earth". To be specific, they were composite attributes, "Severing" and "Binding". That is the form of his soul that was born with him, and the true form of his "Origin".

Sever, and bind – it’s not exactly the same as being called "destruction and rebirth", because Kiritsugu’s Origin has no meaning of "recovery". For example, a string that is cut and then connected again would have change of thickness at the point where the knot is tied. That is, the action of 'severing and binding' would cause irreversible "corruption" in the target.

Kiritsugu became particularly aware of his Origin when he was asked to complete some hands-on work. His hands weren’t very skilled. If a normal contraption breaks down, he could fix it. But if it comes to delicate machinery then everything would suddenly become the opposite. The more he wanted to fix it, the worse the damage would become for the machine.

As a matter of fact, Kiritsugu’s handcraft isn’t extraordinary. If a normal metal wire snapped, the original function can be restored by just connecting it back together. However, if he were to fix a delicate electric circuit using the same principles, the result would be fatal. It wasn’t something that would work as long as everything is connected. If the connections become out of order, the circuit would lose its function.

This wasn't something created by Kiritsugu’s personality or temperament; from magecraft’s point of view, it is the true essence of the root deep within his soul.

Emiya Kiritsugu utilized his extraordinary "Origin" to its fullest extent when he created his Mystic Code. The first and second ribs on both sides were cut off and taken out of his body. The extracted ribs were grinded into dust, condensed with a craft to preserve the soul, and sealed within sixty-six bullets as their core.

These bullets would actualize Kiritsugu’s "Origin" on the target when it hits. If it were to hit a living creature then there would be no wounds or bleeding, but the place where it was hit would appear to be suffering necrosis. The surface may seem to have healed, but the nerves and capillaries wouldn’t be regenerated properly, and the original function would be lost.

Moreover, as a Conceptual Weapon, this bullet poses an even graver threat to magi in particular.

Kiritsugu had already used thirty-seven bullets, but not a single one of them was wasted. The bullets that were made using a part of his body had already completely destroyed thirty-seven magi.

Now, the thirty-eighth "Origin Bullet" severed a new sacrifice’s life force.

Kayneth probably didn’t comprehend what was happening to his body until the end. The moment that the excruciating pain spread into his body, all of his vital organs and nerves had already been torn into a shapeless mess.

Before a scream escaped his throat, he was already spurting out blood. All the muscles in his body were sent into spasms with uncoordinated movements conducted by a nervous system that was on the edge of being broken; the lean body clad in the chic suit began to perform a ridiculous dance.

Using intense pressure to make the densely packed prana, circulating in the Magic Circuits, suddenly begin to ignore those paths and flow chaotically, destroying the practitioner’s body in the process. The moment Volumen Hydrargyrum blocked the Contender’s strike, Kayneth suffered damages more severe than getting directly hit by a bullet.

When Kiritsugu’s magecraft bullet is interfered by magecraft, the impact of the "Origin" within the bullet would affect all the way down to the Magic Circuits of the practitioner.

If we were to compare a magus’s Magic Circuits as a high-voltage power cable, Kiritsugu’s bullet would be a drop of water. What would happen if a conductive liquid attached to a thickly placed electrical circuit? The short-circuiting current would destroy the circuit itself, resulting in permanent damage.

Just like that, shorting out Magic Circuits is the terrifying effect of Kiritsugu’s Mystic Code.

In order to avoid the damage of Kiritsugu's magecraft bullets, one has to discard all magecraft and purely defend the bullet by physical means. On that point, Kiritsugu's choice of using .30-06 Springfield bullets is a malicious one. There isn't something that can completely block this specialized hunting rifle round to begin with. This is a type of bullet that excelled in penetration. As long as one isn't in an armored vehicle, one can't avoid getting hurt.

Only one shot. That would be enough. Kiritsugu dared to choose a gun that doesn't suit real combat, the Thompson Contender, as his Mystic Code, due to the fact that it is the handgun that can deal the maximum physical damage possible.

Kiritsugu placed his finger on the spool of the trigger guard when his beloved gun finished its duty and swung the long barrel downwards as if throwing off a blood stain. The empty cartridge flew from the opened magazine into the empty air with the momentum, falling onto the marble floor with a faint trace of sulfur.

Kiritsugu felt nothing for this victory. This was exactly the same as all the times before, a successful taunt with a calculated conclusion. That is all.

The destructive power of Kiritsugu's magecraft bullet depends on how many Magic Circuits were activated within the target the moment the bullet hit, since what destroys the practitioner's body would be his own prana. On this point, it was absolutely fatal for Kayneth. Since he was provoked continuously and used the utmost amount of prana he had, he granted Kiritsugu the best result he could hope for.

Even the mighty Volumen Hydrargyrum was finished if the practitioner's prana was cut off. Kayneth lay recumbent in the sea of mercury that reverted to its original shape and spread all over the floor, his body twitching slightly. The former Lord El-Melloi was now as harmless as a baby. Let alone the power of a magus, his body may not even be spared a normal human's functions.

Although he was going to die sooner or later if left alone, Kiritsugu's principle is to give a concrete final blow to a fallen enemy. He switched the Calico into semi-automatic and walked towards Kayneth, who already resembled a breathing corpse. He was going to fire one shot into his head at critical distance. Then, one of the seven groups of people fighting for the Holy Grail would have dropped out.

But just then, Kiritsugu felt a mighty aura of prana approaching him with intimidation and frowned.

Unhesitatingly, Kiritsugu held up the Calico and took aim, firing repeatedly towards Kayneth. But the bullet emitted sparks in the empty air and sprayed in all directions and disappeared. It was the twin spears of red and yellow that performed movements too fast for eyes to see.

Facing Lancer, who materialized on a position set to protect Kayneth, Kiritsugu was gob smacked. Stopped by the enemy's Servant at this time; this was definitely unexpected.

Originally, Kiritsugu thought that Saber intercepted Lancer, based on the fact that Kayneth entered the castle alone. But if so, then how did the spearman get past the King of Knights? If Saber was defeated, Kiritsugu would have confirmed that the recipient of his prana had disappeared. However, Kiritsugu's prana was definitely still being absorbed by Saber, who still existed somewhere. His Servant was wholesome without a doubt.

Then, there's only one conclusion – he could only deduce that Saber voluntarily stepped out of Lancer's way.

Lancer stared at Kiritsugu, who was mentally wavering, with a look as cold as ice. He shifted both spears into his right hand, emptying out his left hand to scoop up Kayneth's body. Kiritsugu didn't rashly attack this apparently defenseless move. He had just confirmed that bullets are useless to Servants.

"– You should understand just how easy it is to pierce you through right here, Saber's Master."

For Lancer, had he not heard what Saber just said to him, he would find it very hard to deduce that this man in front of him, who looked nothing like a magus, is in truth the Einzbern Master. However, he knew his lord Kayneth's strength. If he managed to break through Lord El-Melloi's magecraft, there are no grounds left for suspicion.

However – no, just because of that, Lancer's spear tip didn't point towards Kiritsugu.

"I won't let you kill my Master. I won't kill Saber's Master either. Neither I or her want to end in this way."

"..."

Is that so? – Kiritsugu once again regretted the conflicting personalities between himself and his contracted Servant.

“Never forget. The only reason that your life is spared now is the King of Knight’s nobility.”

Lancer declared this to Kiritsugu, his tone carrying a cool sarcasm. Then he took up Kayneth and leapt out of the castle, using his torso to break the glass window.

Kiritsugu wasn’t as foolish as to chase them. Just like Lancer said, that would be a completely suicidal move. Since Saber wasn’t here, there was nothing Kiritsugu could do.

No, even if Saber is beside him, would Kiritsugu entrust this to her?

Although Lancer, the Heroic Spirit Diarmuid, is also naive, it was Saber’s idiotic chivalry, which rivalled Lancer, which completely exceeded Kiritsugu’s capacity of comprehension.

Her mind probably believed very firmly that Lancer would not kill Kiritsugu. There must be something wrong with her. How could the King of Knights do such a thing like permitting her own Master to be exposed to the enemy’s Servant alone? If Lancer decided to go back on his word, then her Holy Grail War would end right there. Even if that spearman had no such thoughts, if Kayneth remained conscious he could have used a Command Seal to demand it of him. Didn’t she even think of such a possibility?

Kiritsugu contemplated this appropriately and lit the cigarette in his mouth.

How ironic. A Heroic Spirit who single-handedly created an extremely foolish trust with an enemy Servant, while she had great estrangements with her own Master.

It looked like he should have chosen his Servant more carefully after all – only then did Kiritsugu feel this failure with a pang and puffed out the hazy smoke with a sigh.

-130:32:15

"Woman, I will ask you a question."

Said Kotomine Kirei with a deep voice as he slowly walked towards the woman who, standing helplessly aside, had no ways of resistance left.

The black-haired woman who served as her bodyguard, lying on the ground like a rag doll and already implacably beaten by him, was no longer a threat.

"Both of you seem to have challenged me in order to protect Kiritsugu. Whose intention is that?"

"…"

Kirei used one hand to grasp and softly raise the silent Einzbern's homunculus. Her statue-like, demure and beautiful face was torn apart by the grief inside her.

"I'll ask once again. Woman, under whose orders you two fought me?"

Kirei was really interested in this question's answer. Who was the person who set such a pointless obstacle in his path to Kiritsugu? That truth is very important for him.

But Kirei did see through one thing. No matter how he searched for them, there were no Command Seals on the body of the homunculus. She was not any Servant's Master. This recent, rash move was one that no Master would do.

In that case, it really was like what he and Tokiomi had known from the very beginning – Emiya Kiritsugu was indeed Saber's master, and these women were merely his pawns.

Now, the troublesome part.

If it was Kiritsugu who commanded these women to fight him, then he would have underestimated him. These women, as adversaries, were defeated by him without much effort.

There was also the possibility that someone else had ordered this. The main goal for the Einzbern was to conceal Kiritsugu, as a Master. For this purpose, they would sacrifice anything. They were probably willing to sacrifice lives just to gain some time.

Still, every possibility led to this one question.

Kirei carefully looked again at the face of the silver haired girl who was gasping for oxygen. It was a doll-like face, too beautiful and well-crafted. Her red pupils were like rubies. She was exactly like the portrait of the "Lady of Winter", Lizleihi Justizia von Einzbern that was passed down through the ages.

This homunculus wasn't a Master, but she still participated in the Holy Grail War. So, she should be the marionette with the responsibility of being the "Grail Vessel". Then she should be a being of great importance in the final stages of the Holy Grail War. To send such a pawn to the front line of the war, and expose her in midst of danger, it's definitely not a foolish move made by amateurs due to a lack of manpower.

Suddenly, Kirei felt a strange sense of weight on the tip of his toes and looked down.

Kirei didn't notice it until now, because it was something so subtle and not worthy of notice. The weak, painful gasps that started from the ground were now beside Kirei’s feet without him knowing it.

With the body full of wounds, the black-haired woman stretched out a trembling hand, and caught Kirei's right leg. Even though her grip was very weak, it was probably all the strength she has left in her body. Even if she had no strength to stand up or to clench her fists, those dim eyes were nonetheless burning with hatred and fixed upon Kirei unwaveringly.

"…"

Kirei, without a word, lifted his foot and trampled down mercilessly upon the chest of the woman with broken ribs. The woman who can’t even wail didn’t let out a sound of pain, just a tragic gulping sound produced by the air squeezed out from her lungs.

Even so, the woman didn't let her hands go. As if she was the driven by the current, firmly attached to a trunk, her weak hands grasped Kirei's arm, but she kept staring at Kirei with an expression of hatred.

Kirei moved his gaze back and lifted up his gaze towards the silver haired woman lifted in midair.

The homunculus, although muffled and twisting her painful body, had no terror reflected in her face. If so, it's nothing special. If it's merely an imitation of humans, it's natural that it hasn't any feelings as fear towards the death or pain — but it doesn't seem like that. Because the red eyes of the homunculus staring at Kirei were certainly full of hate and anger.

Suspended in midair and from the ground, both women looked furiously at Kirei, their eyes full of hatred.

"I won't let you pass from here."

"Even at the cost of my life, I'll stop you here."

Neither of the women answered Kirei's question. Who could have been the one who ordered them to attack Kirei?

No matter how the problem is looked at, there were always contradictions in the reasoning.

Then, Kirei thought about another situation.

What if these women weren't following any instructions, but actually acted accordingly to their own will, thus deciding to fight Kirei?

That was another possibility that couldn't be ignored.

Kirei suddenly felt a familiar spiritual body soundlessly arriving next to him. Assassin's words were transmitted directly to Kirei's mind.

"Caster, and Lancer, as well as his Master, already finished their battle. They've left the forest. Saber will catch up soon. My master, it’s very dangerous here."

Kirei coolly finished listening to Assassin's report, and nodded, disappointedly. It was pointless to do anything there. There was no chance to confront Servant Saber face to face. Instead, even retreating and escaping safely from there was dangerous now.

Now there's only one stratagem to be used – just to stop Saber's pursuit?

Kirei drew from his shirt his new black keys, and without hesitation, as if tearing up cloth, casually stabbed the silver-haired homunculus’s belly.

"Uuu...!"

The artificial woman let out a silent cry, and blood flowed out from her mouth. So, it was red – Kirei let out a bored sigh as he let the shaking body on his hand fall to the ground.

Hurting her was unavoidable. A few minutes should pass before she dies from blood loss. Save her or let her die and chase Kirei: Saber will soon show up and will have to choose between those two demanding options.

It was done. Kirei, without a glance towards the dying women, took the path from where he came and started to gallop through the forest.

At the end of an event, there's no room for unnecessary thoughts. Regarding the two females that just entered the death match, there was nothing important or worthy to remember.

Despite this, as he galloped, the gazes of those two people were imprinted in Kirei's mind.

That was true hatred. Their killing intent were definitely not coming from their sense of duty or doing their job.

Those women were not trying to achieve victory for the Einzberns, but instead they were protecting that man, Emiya Kiritsugu. If it was the former, both women would probably be in the city with Kiritsugu, fighting their enemies. They didn't use this sort of steadfast battle tactics, but instead they were putting aside Kiritsugu and advancing defensively.

Even staying away from Emiya Kiritsugu, they were still willing to protect him. With a persistent desire to win a battle that can't be won.

What trust and expectations did those women had towards Kiritsugu? When the battle skills are in a totally different level and the victory is unreasonable, what were they protecting, trying to do?

A reason for someone to be so thoughtless and to do such a foolish thing, Kirei could only think of one.

Faith -

If those two people were aiding Emiya Kiritsugu because of the faith they have in him, then all of their foolish actions were logical. But at the end, an important question appeared.

Women are frequently selfish beings. Sacrificing themselves to save him is something that can only be done when those two women fully accept him, fully comprehend him.

That was to say — Is Emiya Kiritsugu a being that could be comprehended by others?

"That's not possible..."

Kirei's throat made a moaning, whispering sound.

Those contradictions can't be occurring.

His expectations of Emiya Kiritsugu were completely overturned, an accident to his intuitions.

Emiya Kiritsugu was an empty man. It should be a man who was at the verge of emptiness but still hasn’t found a reason to fight. That's why Kirei

was looking forward to him. He considered that deep in Kiritsugu's heart, in that kind of lifestyle, there should be the answer he was searching for.

If he wanted to do so, Kiritsugu must have been solitary. He mustn't be accepted and comprehended by anyone, thus becoming the master of a soul that has been separated from the world — Just like Kirei.

Kirei threw off the growing suspicions in his heart, as if escaping from those thoughts, and gritted his teeth as he ran through the forest alone.

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Irisviel heard someone calling for her from far away, and dimly opened her eyes.

A familiar face and golden hair, shining even more beautifully as it reflected the light.

"Irisviel, hang on there! Irisviel!"

"Saber...?"

After Irisviel confirmed that it wasn't any other person but the girl that was the King of Knights, she was completely relieved by a sense of safety and nearly collapsed again.

"No! Keep your consciousness! I'll go call Kiritsugu right away. Hang on until then!"

"...Kirei.... Where is the enemy?"

Irisviel asked with a faint voice. Saber frowned regretfully as she answered.

"He escaped. If only I was here a bit earlier, this wouldn't have happened."

"...and Miss Maiya..."

"Although she's also heavily wounded, they aren't life threatening. Yours are worse! The amount of blood coming out from this - "

Saber stopped halfway, astounded.

The blood that flowed out of Irisviel's abdominal wound until now suddenly stopped. Saber carefully rolled up the torn clothes and saw that it was all stained with blood but couldn't find any trace of the wounds on her smooth skin.

"—Sorry, I scared you."

Irisviel got up painlessly from Saber’s arm that was holding her up. Her face ought to be pale, but it already regained its color. The recent wound seemed like a mere illusion.

"Irisviel, What's--"

"It should be alright. Don't worry. Compared to magecraft used to heal others, healing myself is pretty easy... from the beginning, my body wasn't created as a human's body."

"Ah..."

As Irisviel smiled gently towards Saber, whose eyes were wide of surprise, she apologized in her heart for lying to this incomparably trusting knight.

"It's actually thanks to you, Saber..."

Although Irisviel's body, from magecraft's perspective, is artificial, the art of self-healing when the practitioner is unconscious wasn’t added in. What healed her was a miracle that had nothing to do with Einzbern's magecraft.

The Noble Phantasm Avalon • All is a Distant Utopia – it heals all its bearer's wounds, and even stops his aging. The sheath of the holy sword Excalibur. The artifact used back at the Einzbern's castle to summon Heroic Spirit Artoria was now sealed inside Irisviel as a conceptual weapon.

Normally, it should be a trump card that the Master, Kiritsugu, should equip. But then, serving as the front-line substitute Master Irisviel's protection, he left this utmost defensive Noble Phantasm in the hands of his wife. Anyway, if its real owner Saber wasn't near supporting prana, the sheath wouldn't have any properties. To Kiritsugu, who decided from the start to act separately from Saber, it was a useless thing.

Kiritsugu, who didn't trust his own Servant, had carefully asked Irisviel not to tell Saber about the existence of the sheath for insurance. But Irisviel felt very uneasy in her heart about forcefully borrowing the Noble Phantasm of the King of Knights.

Even so, when its effects were confirmed, it was a truly astounding power. Before Saber arrived, Irisviel was undoubtedly in a critical state. Just by the touch of the hand of the king of knights, the wounds suddenly healed, and her strength rapidly recovered. It was nonetheless known as a miraculous Noble Phantasm.

Her Magic Circuit that Kirei broke by brute force should have malfunctions, but now it hadn't any problems. So now she should be able to smoothly use magecraft as always.

So, the next thing should be treating Maiya's wounds. Unconscious, she was not dying, although she suffered serious wounds. Irisviel, looking at the wounds mercilessly done upon the body, realized again the terror of that man, Kirei.

The Executor was a monster. Whether facing firearms or magecraft, he only used his physical capabilities to pulverize Irisviel and Maiya's combined attack.

This is an enemy who should never be allowed to approach Kiritsugu – Irisviel bit her lips because of the intimidation of his presence.

This victory could be called a miracle attained from the persistence. But it was clearly luck. If Saber had been slightly delayed in the battle with Caster or Lancer, Kirei would have reached the castle deep within the forest.

This wasn't the end. Next time, Kirei will challenge Emiya Kiritsugu again.

"But it's not only me who is protecting Kiritsugu... right, Miss Maiya?"

Maiya's pained expression had become serene because of being anesthetized in preparation for healing her. She hadn't regained consciousness yet, and without the usual rejecting, sinister expression on her sleeping face, she just seemed an innocent girl.

She should hate her. Irisviel wasn't inhuman anymore. Because her soul became one of a women, a wife who loved a man. But now, Irisviel must thank Hisau Maiya. Because it was Maiya who told Irisviel her objectives in this War.

"Next time we must win. We'll protect him together..."

After setting a new oath, Irisviel began to concentrate on healing Maiya's bruised body.

Act 8

Act 8

-122:18:42

Meat and wine adorn the table. Rows of brilliant and shining candlesticks.

In the Midcuart large banquet hall, the Erin nobles have gathered, and now is the climax.

However, the ruffians' boasting of their strengths and their drinking contest are strictly forbidden on this day.

These uncultured warriors are just drunk with the fragrance of the graceful flower this evening.

Right, this is a feast to love the flower.

Grainne, the daughter of the High King of Ireland, Cormac mac Airt, is finally going to be betrothed.

The person to whom she would be betrothed is Cumhaill's son, Fionn mac Cumhaill. Receiving intelligence from the oil of the salmon of knowledge, the great warrior who controls the healing water. Unparalleled under the heavens, he is the head of a Fianna, a group of knights. The warrior's strength and fame could even rival those of the High King. There should not be any other marriage engagement which is as joyful as this anywhere else.

Accompanying the old warrior is his son, Oisín, who is also a poet; and also, his grandchild, the warrior Oscar. And then, the almighty group of knights.

The talented Caílte mac Rónáin. Druid Diorruing. “Horror of the Battlefield” Goll mac Morna. Conan of the Gray Lashes. And finally, the one which surpasses even the strongest honor, Diarmuid Ua Dubhine of the love spot.

Each one of them is a great and no less inferior warrior. Amongst them, everyone adores and swear unwavering loyalty to Fionn. Revering the great hero as their leader, entrusting their swords, weapons and lives to that one life. This is a knight's honor. The true worth of warriors which is expressed by bards and handed down.

Yearning for that path.

Going through that path.

Someday when they perish proudly in the battlefield, they would still believe without a doubt.

Until the banquet on that fated night, when he happens to encounter that flower.

“In exchange for my love, accept the geis. My dear, no matter how, annul this abominable marriage. Please take me away……to the ends of the earth!”

Appealing to him in tears, the eyes of the maiden were flaring with earnest love.

That was something which would turn into the purgatory flames which would burn him to ashes……During that time, the hero was able to understand.

And yet, he still did not refuse.

The weight of a geis which would test his honor, and the path of a loyal subject which he followed- as he thought, which one was more precious? No matter how many times he asked or struggled with himself, he did not arrive at an answer.

That's why the thing which spurred him had to be a reason without any relation whatsoever with his pride.

The hero and the princess grasped hands, and together, turned away from the splendor of their futures.

Thus, before long, he became someone in the Celtic legends which were passed down, and the curtains of the story of a tragic love were lifted up.

※※※※※

Passing through that weird dream world, Kayneth woke up from his sleep.

An ancient, distant scene which he had neither seen nor experienced. However, it was not something mysterious. Masters who signed a contract with their Servants, are said to be able to occasionally catch a glimpse of the memory of a heroic spirit in the form of a dream.

For Kayneth, of course he would be familiar with the legends associated with the heroic spirit he summoned. Although he had never thought that he could experience the spectacle to such an extent……the dream just now was unmistakably one of the scenes of “The Legend of Diarmuid and Grainne”.

“But……why am I here?”

Not fully awake yet, Kayneth looked around his surroundings.

He was lying at an empty room. The air which had a touch of but the dust in ruins, was dominated by the cold air of a winter night.

Signs of human activity and previous visits to that place could not be found; a cold room with only machineries.

It was not a place he did not recognize. After the collapse of Fuyuki Hyatt Hotel, this place had been Kayneth's temporary hiding place, the abandoned factory outside the city.

He tried to recollect his cloudy memory.

He was on the pursuit of Caster's tracks and had struggled until the Einzbern forest. And then, with the battle of the Servants behind him, on his own, he tried to confront Saber's master for a duel……He tried to recollect the details, and simultaneously, humiliation and anger surged forth like a broken dam.

At his uncontrollably violent fury, he tried to grasp his fist, and he finally realized. In spite of the fact that he had awakened from his sleep, the truth was that he had no senses in his hands and legs at all.

“Wh…….”

Driven by bewilderment and fear, Kayneth writhed in agony. But his body did not move at all. From the top of a simple bed, he was facing upwards. His chest and back were tightly bound by a belt.

If it was only that he could not get up, he understood. Yet, what did it mean by his unresponsive hands and legs?

The part of him which was tied down was only his torso. There weren't any binds at his limbs. But still…they could not move. It was as if his arms and legs did not exist.

“…Looks like you have regained your consciousness huh.”

From somewhere beyond his field of vision, his beloved fiancée’s voice could be heard. Looks like Kayneth finally started finding fault with that sound.

“Sola!? This, what on earth……Wh-why I am here?”

“Lancer carried you back. He rescued you from your predicament. What's the matter? You can't recall it at all?”

“I was……”

Shot. In the Einzbern castle, just as he was about to kill the make-believe ends and odds magus who pulled cheap tricks……

Yet, he should have been shielded from his enemy's bullets by Volumen Hydrargyrum. He could clearly feel that moment when he was certain of his victory.

However, his memory was interrupted there. Some unknown, excruciating pain had struck him- apparently, something had happened. When he came to, he was lying down on his back. He was not even sure how much time had passed.

In the manner of a palpating doctor, she placed her fingers on Kayneth's arm. However, Kayneth's body senses were completely absent.

“There is evidence that the Magic Circuit in your whole body went berserk. Your internal organs were almost destroyed. Everywhere throughout your body, your muscles and nerves were damaged. It was a miracle that you did not die instantly.”

“……”

“For the time being, I had only managed to restore your internal organs. There's nothing I can do about your nerves. At this rate, even if you heal as time passed, don't wish for recovery to the extent that you can stand and run. Besides that-”

Listening disinterestedly to his fiancée’s diagnosis, Kayneth was gradually tormented by despair.

Self-injury because of the rampage of his prana. For a magus, an end which is the nearest to himself, and more fatal than anything else.

Just because Kayneth felt that he was completely not associated with the making of such an elementary mistake, there was no reason for him not to know what that end meant.

“Besides that- Kayneth, your Magic Circuit was completely destroyed. You cannot use magecraft again.”

“I..... I.....”

Tears welled in the eyes of the man who was once reputed to be the prodigy Lord El-Melloi.

Why did he receive such an ill treatment? He did not understand at all. The world was supposed to be blessing Kayneth. Unlimited future and splendor were supposed to be guaranteed for that genius.

The principles of the world in which Kayneth trusted collapsed noisily, leaving no trace whatsoever.

At this excessively cruel truth, at such incomprehensible unreasonableness, he simply became frightened and broke down in tears. The Kayneth right now was similar to an infant who had understood what fear is for the first time.

“Don't cry, Kayneth. It is still too early to give up.”

Whilst whispering in a comforting voice, Sola caressed his face. In times when he needed it, it is common for her display of affection towards her fiancé to be slightly late.

“The Holy Grail war is still going on. Kayneth, the fruits of your plans! As long as I, the source of prana, am here, the contract with lancer can still continue. We have not lost yet.”

“.....Sola?”

“If the Holy Grail is an omnipotent wish granter, a complete recovery for your body should be entirely possible, right? It'll be great if you win. If you remain in the war and obtain the Holy Grail, everything will be back to normal.”

“.....”

Sora-Ui's words should cheer Kayneth up and give him hope. The encouragement of her as his partner and supporting fiancée ought to, above all else, give him courage.

And yet- why did an indescribable uneasiness blow through Kayneth's heart like a draught?

Whether or not it was because of her knowledge of his doubts, displaying the smile of an affectionate mother, she held Kayneth's right arm. At the back of his hand which was made impotent, there were still two Command Spells remaining, creeping on his fingers.

“That's why, Kayneth……Please hand these Command Spells to me. I will take over Lancer as a Master. To bring you the Holy Grail.”

“N-no!”

His immediate response was probably because of his brute instinct. Having lost everything, these two Command Spells were the last mementoes he had- *I must not let it go*, Kayneth's spirit was screaming that.

Facing Kayneth who became afraid for no reason, in a way as if soothing a resentful child, Sola continued her words.

“Don't you trust me? Although I don't have a magic crest, I am still a magus from the Sophia-Ri family. I who am going to marry the Archibald’s; for me to carry out Lord El-Melloi's duty, is there anything strange with it?”

“No, but……”

Its logic was resounding within him.

Certainly, it was now hard for him to go to the battleground and watch over Lancer's battles. Now that things had come to such a pass, he could not even protect himself. Just like what the Einzberns would do, if they were to set an assassin or something like that towards the Master at the side of the battle between the Servants, he might really lose his life this time.

Sola's rank as a magus is severely inferior to Kayneth. However, Waver who summoned Alexander, and the bloodthirsty murderer who formed a contract with Caster; those whose participations as master’s were completely out of the question, were still in this Holy Grail war. As for battle tactics, even for Sola, it is not entirely impossible for her to win through the battles.

And then, when it comes to using a Servant, Command Spells which make them submit to the Master are indispensable. But still...

Kayneth remembered. The hot look Sola had whilst gazing at Lancer at the hotel late at night after his first battle ended. An intoxicated glance as if she was dreaming, something not shown to him, her fiancé, before.

If she was merely fascinated by a handsome man, then that is still excusable. It is just a small, problematic indisposition a woman has. Her admiration towards man to that extent was something which he, as her husband, could not help with.

Yet, Lancer was said to be a case of “not just an ordinary handsome guy”.

“……Sola. Do you think that Lancer would turn away from me and swear allegiance to you?”

Towards Kayneth who had killed his reluctance and asked, without any hesitation, Sola nodded.

“He is still but someone who responded to the invitation of the Holy Grail. His heart which seeks the Holy Grail is together with us. Even if his Master is substituted, for the sake of his goal, he would endure and accept it.”

“That is……wrong.”

Kayneth said within his heart. Sola may or may not know, but Diarmuid Ua Dubhine, the heroic spirit, is not such a commendable person.

Certainly, heroic spirits who are called by the Holy Grail as Servants, would form any contract in order to participate in the Holy Grail War. As heroic spirits or not, they are expected to have a reason for seeking the Holy Grail. Because they have wishes they have charged to the Holy Grail, they submit to their own Masters, and dash forward together to receive the blessings of the Holy Grail.

Because of that, a Servant's Master would face the summoned heroic spirit and start by asking his wish. What he wished for to seek the Holy Grail, why he had responded to his summon and appeared. As long as those reasons were not cleared up, their relationship would not work out. This is because, by any chance, if their respective wishes are totally contradictory, he may go through a painful betrayal once they acquire the Holy Grail.

Naturally, Kayneth had already asked Diarmuid about his wishes earlier on. Along with or not whether he had wanted to do anything in the event that they managed to procure the Holy Grail.

Nevertheless, the heroic spirit did not answer.

No, that is not correct. Diarmuid did not refuse to reply. Just that he denied the question itself.

In other words, “he was not seeking the Holy Grail”.

Repayments are not necessary. To merely devote his loyalty to his summoner who is his Master in this life, to fulfil his honor as a knight. That is his only wish.

He could not understand. For a person who was renowned enough to be a heroic spirit to abandon his pride and be the familiar of a human being, it doesn't add up if he did not have a great reason as well. It did not turn out to be “free service” or other jokes.

Yet, no matter how skillfully he tried to question him, stubbornly, Lancer did not take back his previous answer.

“If I can fulfill my honor as a knight, that would be good enough. I will cede the wishing machine, the Holy Grail to Master alone.”

All the time, with that persistence, Lancer continued to refuse the Holy Grail.

...If he were to reflect on it, it is possible that since that time, he started to feel distrust towards the Servant he contracted with.

It is impossible for a Servant not to seek the Holy Grail.

If that's the case, Lancer's answer was definitely an obvious lie. His true intentions were definitely hidden.

That's fine as well, he thought. On Kayneth hands are the Command Spells. As long as he has this absolute commanding authority, Diarmuid's betrayal is impossible. Servants are after all, just tools, no different from any ordinary machines. It is not a problem for something like a tool to have anything bad hidden within its heart. If it can carry out its functions perfectly, then that is good enough. That was Kayneth's decision until last night.

Nevertheless, in front of Sola who did not doubt Lancer at all, Kayneth could not be as tolerating as before.

If that guy abides by Sola...if he believes that guy's words...then unmistakably, he is driven by a wish different from the Holy Grail.

He is a heroic spirit which must not be trusted. To begin with, that was the case in the stories of his lifetime. Wasn't him the treacherous subordinate who stole his lord's fiancé and fled.....?

“The Command Spells.....I'm not handing them over.”

Plainly, Kayneth declared.

“Command Spells and Magic Circuits are different systems of magecraft. Now, I can still exercise it. I.....right now, I am still Lancer's Master!”

Huhh... Sola sighed deeply.

Along with that long sigh, the gentle smile on her face vanished.

“Kayneth, you don't understand huh.....Whatever the case, we must win.”

Kruck, the dry sound of a twig being stepped on could be heard.

From Kayneth's right hand which she had been treating gently until now, Sola casually twisted his little finger off.

As usual, there was no pain. However, that numbness caused Kayneth's fear to multiple. Just like that, without encountering any resistance, she could have easily twist off the remaining four fingers one by one.

“Hey, Kayneth. For my standard of spiritual healing techniques, it is impossible for me to forcibly extract your Command Spell. Only when there is consent from the owner himself, I can remove THIS without any resistance.”

Saying that without any expression, only her gentle voice was like just now, unchanged. As if trying to persuade a dull-witted child, she continued to the end, calmly.

“If you don't consent no matter what.....I cannot do anything else but to cut down this right arm. How about it?”

At the rear entrance of the abandoned factory, in the darkness, the thicket which had reverted back to its quietness, grew luxuriantly.

Exposing herself to the cold night air, after waiting for the heat of her excitement to cool down, Sola called out to the shapeless sentry.

“Lancer, please come forth. I have something to say.”

Complying to her call, the heroic spirit, Diarmuid immediately materialized beside her.

Under the eyes which were facing down humbly, there was this love spot which further emphasized his existence bewitchingly. Prioritizing his ease of movements, his lightweight armor emphasizes more strongly the fearlessness of his body, which is tense like the birds of prey.

No matter how many times she had seen him, she still let out a sigh. The core of her body heated up.

“Are there anything abnormal outside?”

“Right now, this place is safe. Occasionally, there is this presence which felt like the loitering demons which came from Caster. But they do not seem to have sniffed this place out and come to attack us. The boundary field Lord Kayneth set has not fallen apart yet.”

Nodding, Sola felt relieved inside her heart. If Lancer had been on the lookout so seriously, he should not have noticed the incident which had occurred inside the building.

“Right, Sola-Sama. How is Lord Kayneth's condition?”

“Not good. I have applied the usual treatment, but……although his arms are recovering slowly, his legs are probably over.”

With a gloomy expression, Sola lowered her head. Looks like this scrupulous heroic spirit was still feeling responsible for Kayneth's injury.

“If I had discerned the situation more carefully……my master would not have forced to the point of death right under my nose……”

“You were not aware of it. Kayneth reaps what he sows He probably wanted to win this Holy Grail war too much.”

“No, but……”

Towards the hesitating Lancer, Sola hardened her resolve, and let out the words within her heart.

“He is not appropriate to be your Master, Diarmuid.”

Lancer was silent and stared fixedly at Sola's face. Pinning down her heart which was entranced by merely this straight look, she lifted up the back of her right hand and showed it to Lancer.

Distinctly etched onto it was two Command Spells which were supposed to still be on Kayneth's hand until just a while ago.

“Kayneth has renounced his fighting, and hand over his authority as a Master to me. From tonight onwards, Lancer- you are my Lancer.”

“.....”

After being silent and looked down for a short while, as if already employed, he shook his head.

“I have sworn loyalty to Lord Kayneth as a knight. Sola-Sama.....I cannot consent to that request.”

“No way!?”

At that reaction which betrayed her expectations, the one who was rather confused was Sola.

“From the start, it is because of my prana that you are still a Servant in this present world, right? And now, I even have as far as the Command Spells. This time, I alone should be your genuine contractor!”

“Receiving your prana, being bound by the Command Spells; these words are not related at all.”

Casting down his eyes apologetically, Lancer continued quietly.

“Above being a Lancer, I was a knight before this. There can only be a master to whom I would devote my loyalty. Sola-Sama, please forgive me.”

“.....Am I not fit to be a Master? Diarmuid.”

“This and that are different-”

“Look into my eyes and speak!”

At her reprimand, reluctantly, Lancer lifted his face up, and faced her directly. Those eyes which were brimming with tears was way beyond what

Lancer had expected…moreover, it was accompanied by the most unpleasant déjà vu.

Formerly, he had also faced a lady before who had pleaded with him with tears in such a manner.

“……Lancer fight with me. Protect me, support me, capture the Holy Grail with me.”

“I cannot do that. If Lord Kayneth had renounced fighting, I cannot wish for the Holy Grail as well.”

Greatly agitated, Sola almost blurted the words which she could not hold back. Barely restraining herself, after waiting for her throbbing heart to calm down, she continued in a stiff voice.

“If you are still persisting on being Kayneth's knight, Lancer, then you have to strive hard to win the Holy Grail all the more. I have already told you his condition just now. For that body to heal, the help of a miracle is absolutely necessary. Only the Holy Grail fits it, right?”

“……”

Lancer felt silent again. However, this time his silence was affirming and acquiescent.

“If you feel responsible for his injury, if you think of regaining Lord El-Melloi's dignity, if you do not proffer the Holy Grail to your Master…”

“……Sola-Sama, as Lord Kayneth's partner, you seek the Holy Grail only for Lord Kayneth. Is that right?”

“Th-that's, of course.”

At Lancer's quiet gaze, Sola gulped and replied.

“Can you please swear it? That you have no ulterior motives.”

She had wanted to burst into tears if she could. Screaming in an unladylike manner, whilst clinging onto this lovely man, expressing what's in her heart.

Still, if she were to do so, this haughty heroic spirit would probably refuse her point blank this time. She could not express her heart. At least not now.

“-I swear. As Kayneth El-Melloi's wife, I will offer the Holy Grail to my husband.”

After taking that oath in a firm voice, Lancer finally relaxed his expression, and nodded quietly.

That was something which was probably too faint to be called a smile. Nevertheless, Sola was over the moon. This is because at last, his expression which showed signs of a smile was directed towards her.

That's right, it didn't matter even if it was a lie—Sola thought about her hidden heart again.

If she could preserve her ties with this man now, no matter in what way, it didn't matter. For this sake, no matter how despicable the lie was, she would say it. She would not let anyone rebuke her for that. That's right, never- she would never allow anyone to hinder her.

He is not a human, but a spiritual being temporarily visiting from another world. A transient miracle brought forth by the Holy Grail. Yet, Sola's feelings did not change.

If she were to think back, ever since she had reached the age of reasoning, her heart had frozen. For Sola who was given birth to a family of magecraft who already a legitimate child had, she was not brought up with the feelings of a woman.

The magecraft's blood which was refined repeatedly throughout generations. A lady whose worth was nothing but that.

In other words, ever since the time the cry of the baby was heard, she had no other USAGE other than for the arranged marriage.

She did not feel regretful. She did not even harbor questions. There was no leeway for her to choose. She obeyed the arranged marriage her parents agreed upon quite willingly. Her frozen soul did not feel any lament towards having to call the man she was utterly uninterested in, husband, for the rest of her life.

However, it is different now.

Before this, has she ever heatedly felt her heart throbbing so rapidly before?

Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri's heart was no longer frozen. That is because she knew the warmth of her heart which was madly in love.

Even after Sola returned to her bedroom, Lancer was still remaining outside alone, standing guard. For Servants, sleep is not necessary. As long as they have enough supply of prana from their Masters, weariness is unrelated to their body.

Consequently, he had no way to forget his troubles by sleeping,

Recalling Sola's words again and again, Lancer let out a sigh.

That look which abandoned everything and pleaded with him wholeheartedly and pitifully, was too similar to the look of his “wife” in the past.

Princess Grainne.

Imposing the geis of betrayal on him, the perpetrator who caused him to fall from the position of a glorious hero to that of a refugee. However, Diarmuid never resented her.

Without any other reason, even if it were a passion which was solely due to captivation from the Mystic Face of the hero, her choice of running away from the seat of Micuart's banquet for this sake was a decision that, as far as the lady is concerned, was at the risk of her life.

The ties with her relatives, the pride of the princess, and also the promised glory of the future……Turning her back to everything, Grainne chose the pathway of love with Diarmuid. If that beginning was because of the mystical force of his charm, the day when she would doubt her love would probably come. Nevertheless, without any fear towards such a future, Grainne continued her way of life with love.

Diarmuid was dragged into this disaster; this is the view of others. Still, the person himself, Diarmuid, did not have such perception. Above his own suffering, he was the man who constantly felt more heartache at that of his partner.

At the weight of the geis which tested his pride, he did not even yield to it. There was reluctance. There were struggles as well. That was why he felt distressed at his perversion towards the ruler, Fionn mac. In the end, he grew attached to the courage of Grainne, this woman, who believed in her feelings until the end; and loved her to the end.

Naturally, their pathway of love was full of hardships.

Driven by jealousy and resentment, Fionn mac Cumhaill mobilized every one of his subordinates to pursue the two of them who had taken flight and hunted them down like a wild beast. Whilst protecting the princess, Diarmuid resolved not to cross weapons with the knights under Fionn, with whom he was friends. However, towards the foreign pursuers who were assembled because of Fionn's pact with them, he did nothing but bare his fangs.

His fight with the giant Searban, his fights with the nine Garbs, his fight with Fionn's nanny, “Witch of the Millstone”……The consequence was, Diarmuid's getting stuck at using his valor which surpassed the previous achievements established in the knight troupe, again and again; to formulate the flight with Princess Grainne. As for him who was known by others as the most noble subject, that was too ironic an epic.

Loyalty? Love?

Whilst cutting up the enemies with both his lances, his heart was torn apart again. Though being tormented by the dilemma of his contradicting loyalty and geis, his refined, twin lances pierced through the previous enemies, meaninglessly bringing about deaths.

A lady and two men- Because of merely the sentiments and obstinacy, much blood was spilled.

At the end of the day, the one who was heartbroken after the futility of these sacrifice, was still Fionn. The old master recognized to Diarmuid and Grainne’s marriage, bestowed a proper title and territory, and welcomed him as a subject again.

The reconciliation Diarmuid wanted unceasingly. Yet, that ending was just the harbinger of the conclusive catastrophe.

One day, Diarmuid who was hunting together with Fionn, received a deep wound from a wild boar's fangs. That was a mortal wound, but since Fionn was beside him, he was not afraid. That's because, with the records of countless miracles as a hero attached to him, Fionn could transform spring water scooped with his hands into a miracle drug.

Yet, in front of a subject on the verge of death, the thing which went to and fro in the old master's mind, was the bitter jealousy of the dispute for one woman.

The well from which spring water flowed out, was only nine steps away from the collapsed Diarmuid.

In order for Fionn to cure the knight's wound, he only had to walk nine steps and bring back the water. That alone would suffice. Nevertheless, in spite of such a short distance, water spilled from his hands twice.

And then at the third time he scooped the water, Diarmuid, the hero's breathing stopped.

-Now, being invited to the present world again as a Servant, looking back at his end during those bygone days, Diarmuid had no sense of regret at all. He did not have any intention of cursing anyone. He wanted to reply to his wife's love. He could understand Fionn's anger as well. It was just that the twist of fate was way too cruel.

It was not just a life full of suffering and anguish only. The glass by which he drank with the king, and the whispers-containing lovers' talks as well, were left within him as irreplaceable memories. Although the end was tragic, Diarmuid did not consider being dissatisfied with God's will. This is because he and the others around him had earnestly lived their lives to the fullest.

He did not deny the one life which had passed by him.

Still, suppose that...

He becomes a knight again, picks up his spears, and lives a second life……

This supposedly impossible miracle was borne within heroic spirit Diarmuid's heart.

His crushed former honor. His pride which could not be fulfilled. A chance to pick it up again. That was everything Diarmuid wished for.

A path of life with his long-cherished wishes, which did not come true in his previous life.

This time, surely, his path of faithfulness...

Together with a loyalty without any shadow of doubt, the honor of lifting up the victory to his master...

In short, there was absolutely no wish Lancer charged towards the Holy Grail. Receiving a master for a second time, during the times when he stood at the battlefield called “Fuyuki”, his wish was already half achieved.

And the other half would be accomplished when he attains victory. Bringing the Holy Grail back to his Master, the moment the fruits of his loyalty take shape, his everything would be fulfilled.

That was supposed to be only it. He was never supposed to have a wish beyond that.

However, Diarmuid's path right now, was beginning to be shrouded with ominous dark clouds. In between his new ruler's time, the Mystic Face which he was burdened with, was trying to drive the wedge in again.

If Sola could come to the realization that she was only foolishly entranced by the Mystic Face, the worst-case scenario could be avoided.

Yet, if she were to become the second Grainne and cling onto him tightly, during that time, would he be able to shake off the woman's feelings?

This was supposed to be a battle to compensate for his tragic fate. If that happens, he would never want to repeat the tragic fate.

But still, how should he do it?

In the midst of the darkness of the still night, having no way to even discover the answer, Lancer just looked up to the moon in agony, doing nothing else.

-108:27:55

The roar of waves lapping against the shore.

At the beach, perhaps the break of dawn was not far away, for the ashen ray of light which illuminated the riverbank was overshadowing the light mist with whiteness.

The sandy beach continued endlessly towards both left and right. The sea surface was enveloped in a white frost, and its frontier could not be seen. The masked landscape, was it a land opposite the shore? A faraway horizon? Or, was there *nothing at that side*?

Besides the restless roar of the waves, there was absolute silence.

With no clouds on the sky and no winds at the land, even if there were any kind of human activities, they would be far away from this shore.

Going forward continuously, going forward continuously only towards the east, leaving every single thing in this world behind at the west; and with that, reaching the desolate, empty coast.

That is why surely, at the other side of the mist, *there was absolutely nothing*.

Above that, the world did not exist earlier, and moreover, an expedition was impossible. This place was- the sea of the extremity of this world.

By just closing one's eyes, he could hear the roar of the waves.

That was permitted to no one but the one who went to the extreme end of the world. The melody of the roaring sea became distant-

“__”

He had seemingly dozed off lying on the desk.

With his shoulders stiffened due to his unreasonable posture, despite moaning with the pain as if he was numbed, Waver lifted his face.

He had a feeling that he was seeing a somewhat strange dream. A dream which he could see clearly, despite having no sense of himself; a dream as if he was peeping into someone else's memory.

The day had already darkened. Looks like he had accidentally wasted his time by dozing off for a very long time. He clicked his tongue at his own carelessness. Right now, there was seemingly nothing more valuable than time.

Every Master was scrambling to get Caster's head on the platter. The supplement of a Command Seal as a reparation to whoever managed to accomplish it the fastest……He did not even expect any hands to let this off. Especially for Waver, the runaway who has Alexander as his Servant, the injunction authority of the Command Seals could also be called as the “last resort”. He would not hand it over, whatever the circumstances.

No matter who the heroic spirit is, if it is of the class Caster, it is not wrong to say that he is a Servant who is someone full of tricks up his sleeves. The one who can challenge him head on without any plans, is someone like Saber's class which boasts of strong magic resistance skill. As for Rider, a class separate from the three knights; generally, he would have no choice but to face him with some strange strategy in hand. In reality, he judged that Alexander's magic resistance is about D level……he had no choice but to do with that consoling amount of defense.

Because of that, the best way thing to do when he faces Caster, is to skillfully tempt Saber towards Caster, as if he was going to fight Saber; and to wait for their drop out. However, the supplementary Command Seal he was striving for at great lengths, would elude him. Proposing an alliance with Saber to collaborate with them to hunt Caster down would be a poor plan. If he were to think of fighting forward in the Holy Grail war advantageously, not outwitting the others here would be meaningless.

A whole day and night after the announcement at Fuyuki church. For the time being, he had directed Rider to investigate about it, an idea which had struck him. Intending to work out a strategy, Waver had stayed back at his house, but……distressed, he finally fell asleep; because of which, that arrogant Servant would say something sarcastic to him.

No, it would be great if he finished off with just ordinary sarcasm- Recalling the pain due to the innumerable times of pokes at his forehead, Waver grasped his forehead reflexively. He hated that already. Sooner or later, won't it cause a crack at his skull?

Whilst thinking about that, Waver heard brisk footsteps coming up the staircase from the downstairs and froze. Come to think of it, it was about time the old woman finished the dinner preparations and came up to call Waver. Right now, the things which were suspicious-looking were- for the time being, not there.

After a humble knock, the voice of the old woman could be heard, but its message was completely different from what Waver expected.

“Waver-Chan, Alex-san has arrived.”

“—Haa?”

Who? As he was about to ask back, an extremely disturbing hunch struck Waver's mind.

Alex……ALEX……ANDER?

How could this be? Just as he thought that, *gahaha!* a hearty laughter in a loud voice arose from the living room downstairs.

“……WAIT a minute!?”

His expression changing, Waver bolted out of his room, and without so much as a glance at the dumbstruck old woman, he ran down the stairs as if he was half-tumbling down and leaped into the dining kitchen at which dinner preparation was starting.

The television was on every night's variety. Glenn, the old man who enjoys having beer to go along with the starter. In the usual dinner view, there was about one extra foreign object within it.

Balancing his big frame dangerously, sitting on the guest chair, “Yo!” that Servant lifted his hand relaxedly, after which, “Gulp gulp,” drained the cup into which beer had been poured.

“Wow, what a pleasant drink!”

Holding a bottle in his hand and advancing onto the next one, Glen-shi who had acquired this drinking partner, was completely delighted.

“Our Waver as well. After coming back from England, I had hoped that he would feel alcohol at least once, but he still can't do it. I have been so bored until now!”

“Hahaha, that's because he doesn't know how to enjoy himself. 'People who enjoyed life will win,' I had always been trying to tell him that.”

A friendly chat between the old man and the King of Conquerors. At this spectacle which appeared to not just be a bad joke, Waver could not even say a word.

Returning to the kitchen after that, with a troubled look on her face, the woman tapped Waver's shoulder.

“You can't be like that. If a guest is coming, you have to tell me earlier. If I had known about that, I would have prepared a better feast. Geez.”

“……err, eh……?”

Smiling at Waver who was somewhere else, Rider shook his head.

“No madam, please don't trouble yourself. That's because a simple home-like style is the best hospitality.”

“Hmm. You are quite good at compliments.”

Ohoho, the laughing wife was completely caught up in Rider's cheerful pace. Looks like Waver was the only one who had become “unreadably” still in this atmosphere.

“As you have known, our Waver is that sort of temperamental person, right? I can't help but to worry if he is getting along fine in the school in England. If he has such a dependable person like you, sir, as a good friend, looks like I have worried too much for nothing!”

“No. He is the one who has been of help to me. Even these trousers, he had chosen and bought it for me. Looks great on me, doesn't it!”

At the time when he was entrusted with external businesses, Waver got stuck with buying stuff for him, and bought an XL-size washed-jeans for Rider, which he proudly showed off. It was still a mystery as to how on earth the conversation between the two worked out, but at any rate, Waver was at last, beginning to understand what type of person “Alex-san” to the Mackenzie couple is.

As for the old couple who were cast suggestion upon using magecraft, Waver is their grandson, furthering his studies abroad in England. But for Rider, he is passed off as a friend Waver met during his voyage, and has boldly paid the Mackenzie residence a visit, thus settling down at a seat at the dinner table- this is seemingly the chain of events.

He thought about how the old couple could believe Rider so easily- probably it was because of Rider's huge size which forced them to do so.

“Alex-san, until when do you plan to be in Japan?”

“Err, well, until I settle some minor business, that's about, close to a week.”

“If it's okay, hey, how about staying at our house? Unfortunately, we don't have a small room to be used as a guest room, but if a futon is spread out on Waver's room, one more person should be able to sleep there, right? Hey, Waver?”

“.....”

“FUTON? Ooh, this country's bedding! I really want to enjoy it to the fullest!”

“HAHAHA. Sleeping on the floor instead of a bed; it would feel strange during the times when you are still not used to it. Although we have been here for a long time, we were really surprised by it at the beginning!”

“That thing is the appeal of this foreign country huh. I like the surprises of unknown things. No matter what age it is, *I* would always enjoy Asia!”

Although he had unintentionally betrayed himself by using the first person pronoun, without even the slightest hint of recognition, old man Glen nodded with a smile on his face.

“Come now, it's about time the meal was ready. Waver-Chan, please take your seat as well.”

Being urged by the old wife, Waver sat down on his chair, dispirited. The seat on which he was already supposed to get used to sitting, no matter what he did tonight, was still uncomfortable.

Although dinner had suddenly changed from the everyday one, displaying a grandeur similar to a semi-feast, eventually, Waver was silent from the start till the end. Sitting beside Rider who was laughing heartily and unreservedly, he did not even feel the taste of the food he put into his mouth.

“—So, what the heck are you doing??”

After finishing dinner, Rider went back to the room again, holding a futon set borrowed from the landlord under his armpit. And then, Waver started off by questioning the Servant.

“What……If I were to enter the main door normally, an excuse is absolutely necessary right?”

“When you come in and out, TURN INTO SPIRITUAL FORM! I HAVE TOLD YOU SO MANY TIMES!!”

Confronting Waver, who threw a tantrum and was half-crying, Rider became disappointed instead.

“But I can't bring *this* in if I turn into spiritual form…”

Saying that, the object the giant showed was a small sports bag brought into the room under the pretext of being a travelling hand luggage.

“I don’t know what it is, but bringing this thing back is my duty for the day isn't it? For this sake, you had even openly given me these trousers. In the first place, the one who ordered me was you, wasn't it?”

“That's why I said……If you would just place that thing in front of the house secretly, I can just go and get it afterwards. That's all!!”

“If that's the case, isn't it the same if I enter the main entrance openly and think of an excuse? —Or should I say, in the first place, what the heck is this!?”

With a rather unsatisfied expression, Waver took the bag Rider held out, and inspected the contents.

There were altogether twenty-four test tubes being plugged by stoppers. As for those containers which were differentiated from their handwritten alphabetical labels, all of them were sealed with colorless and transparent liquids.

“Finally, I can wear trousers. I had wanted to take a stroll down some lightened-up areas—But for me, the King of Conquerors, why did you want me to go to a country-like riverside to draw water?”

“That's much more meaningful than munching rice crackers and watching the television, that's why.”

Waver swiftly cleared the table, and removed the whole set of experiment tools, one of the few valuable items he brought from his school dormitory in London. He then prepared the operation.

Vials into which ores and reagents were filled, spirit lamp mortar, droppers……At those apparatus which were lined up on the desk one by one, the King of Conquerors frowned.

“What is this? So, you plan to start off with some make-believe alchemy?”

“It's the real thing, not make-believe. Idiot.”

While replying disappointedly, Waver set up the test tubes Rider brought back in the tube rack according to the labels. And then he selected the complementary reagents and mixed them together. This was just something which was repeated many times in the Clock Tower as the basic subject. As for the amount, even with his eyes closed, he would not go wrong.

“Just to be sure, but you're sure that you did not make any mistake with the places drawn on the map?”

“Are you looking down on me, boy? What could possibly go wrong with something of such standard?”

Grumbling, Rider tossed the folded-up map to Waver. Fuyuki city's complete map. Besides that, with a roughly fixed interval, alphabets filled the map alongside the Mion River from the river mouth upstream.

The inscriptions on the map were marked with labels from the test tubes Rider brought back. The liquid content was the water of the Mion River retrieved from designated spots along the river. As for Rider who wanted to go out in the materialized form no matter what, with his buying clothes for Rider as a condition, Waver ordered him to collect the river water. As expected, leaving whether Rider would be of use or not aside, it seems that it was a more useful task than ordering him out for something like a useless walk.

“……What am I doing?”

Silently, he made progress on the preparation of the reagents, and as if going back to the elementary department at Clock Tower, Waver was quite unhappy. He who should be participating glamorously in the Holy Grail war as a Servant's Master, why is he repeating such plain and boring work again?

Whilst letting out a melancholic sigh, he plugged the reagents which were fully mixed with a stopper. With that done, first of all, he unplugged the stopper of the test tube labelled “A” and dropped a drop of reagent into the center.

“……Uwahh.”

Exceeding his expectation, the reaction was instantaneous. The water, which was supposed to be colorless and transparent, suddenly turned into rust red color.

“-t on earth is this?”

He thought that Rider would surely start with the sequel of the video, but Rider was watching the experiment over Waver's shoulder with an engrossed expression. Although explaining was troublesome, because a barrage of questions would intrude upon his work even more, Waver did not ignore him and answered.

“Traces of the remains of the procedure. The remains of the magecraft in the water.”

Label A, namely the position where the river mouth is the closest to the sea. At that location, such a reaction was evidently abnormal.

“The upstream of the river—but still at a position considerably close to the river mouth. Who performed magecraft there? If we go upstream from here, we could probably grasp the location.”

“……Boy, since the start, did you realize that the water of that river is mixed with such a thing?”

“No way! But it is a land with water flowing through the heart of the city. It is natural to start investigating from the water.”

To find out the whereabouts of the magi, the easiest way is the “Water” element. As an absolute principle, water is something which “flows from a higher place to a lower place”. Compared to the effort needed to calculate the wind's direction and read the earth's pulse, finding the lowest flow of the water pulse is the least laborious. And this is further the case for a land with rivers.

In the case where there are other ways of investigation, he thought as far as starting off with the easiest one first, but……it seems like Waver had already drawn the “winner”. For now, it could be said that luck was with him.

B, C, D…….Following the order, he deftly dropped the reagent into the river water in the test tubes. As it heads toward upstream, the reaction becomes increasingly stronger. At this joke-like conspicuousness, Waver's emotions surpassed wonder, into utter shock. This could be nothing but due to someone setting up a workshop right in the middle of the river and discarding the waste directly without any precaution whatsoever. Such a magus who is worse than third-rate magi, and is but a mere fool, does not ex—no, exists. That very newbie. The incident Waver heard from the supervising Father at the church, to which he was summoned this morning.

“But still, confirming it with such a way……I don't feel proud at all.”

Exhausting his ingenuity to outsmart the enemy, competing their wonders with each other—That is the “Magecraft Contest” which Waver imagined. What he was doing now- making progress by carrying out underground investigations like a police forensic- was something people with *no* talent whatsoever do. Though he had already grasped the positive results in his hands, what was left in Waver's heart was the bad aftertaste of humiliation.

The reaction of Label P was now in the state of a black ink. If it becomes any murkier than this, such a simple method like this could no longer be used for the analysis.

With the expectation of what would happen, he dropped the reagent into test tube Q.

“……”

The water remained transparent. No matter how vigorously he shook it, there was no response.

Waver opened up the map again and pointed at the P and Q scribblings.

“Rider, here, and here, what's in between them? Draining trench? Mouth of an irrigation channel?”

“Oh? There was something remarkably big there…”

“That's it! If we track back this thing, Caster's workshop is probably there.”

“……”

For some reason, with a solemn face, Rider gazed at Waver closely.

“Oi, boy. Could it be that you are some great excellent magus?”

At those utterly unexpected words, Waver could not help but to take it as something cynical. Snorting, he turned away.

“This is not something great magi would do. The method is the worst among the worst. YOU, you're making fun of me huh.”

“What are you talking about? If you achieve good results using a poor method, isn't that a much greater achievement than starting from better methods? You should be proud of yourself! As a Servant, I am proud as well.”

Laughing boldly, Rider clapped the master of a small build. Increasingly upset, Waver tried to retort, but realizing that it was completely useless to preach the mysteries of magecraft to this Servant, he held his silence and shrugged off the matter.

“All right! After grasping the location, it is now my turn! Hey boy, do you plan to strike at once?”

“Hey wait! The enemy is Caster. Attacking immediately may be a little stupid.”

For a magus, the layout of his workshop can be said to be the compilation of the sorcery he mastered within him. Consequently, capturing the workshop means possessing the equivalent power, skills, and everything of the resources, and to challenge head-on.

Especially the one who is called the hero of sorcery, Servant Caster. The ability of the class' attribute, “Territory Creation”, is amplified. As long as he possesses the skill which enabled him to create within the shortest time, the workshop which demonstrates the very best result whatever the terrain and requirements are, in this battle, Caster is the one who can boast of being the strongest among the seven Servants. Because of that, in going against that workshop, reckless actions like attempting a head-on bulldozing action, even if it were Caster's natural enemy, Saber; would be equivalent to suicide.

Such a standard of reasoning should be understood even by Rider, but apparently, this Servant did not even have the slightest consideration for that. Before one noticed, Rider had already materialized the “Sword of Cypriot”, sheathed it, and in that manner, tapped Waver's shoulder whilst grinning broadly.

“Look. In a war, the camp's position changes every now and then. If you have grasped the position and don't strike with immediately; if you let them slip, it would be too late then to even regret.”

“.....You, why are you so fired up again today?”

“Of course! My Master has finally shown some achievement which is likely to get us some results. If that's the case, bringing back the head of the enemy and repay my master, that is my spirit as a Servant.”

“.....”

At such a ticklish manner of saying things, Waver was also at a loss of the best words to answer back.

As if taking that silence as consent, whilst laughing wholeheartedly, Rider hit his master’s slender shoulder and nodded.

“Don't give up at such a beginning. For the time being, we just try to strike them, isn't it? Maybe we can unexpectedly pull this off?”

“.....”

The former soldiers under the King of Conquerors, were they dragged about in this way until the extreme east end of Asia as well? Thinking that, Waver could not suppress his sympathy towards the ancient warriors.

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—Eventually, they somehow did it.

The interior of the sewer Waver discovered, was indeed the haunts of non-humans. Possessing countless tentacles, the innumerable aquatic monsters stayed there as if crowding together in the narrow tunnel, lying in wait to strangle any pitiful trespasser to death.

Naturally, although he was shown such a disgusting scene, for Alexander, the King of Conquerors, there was no other remedy apart from one.

“AAAALaLaLaLaie!!”

The trampling rampage of Gordius Wheel • Wheel of Heaven's Authority in the sewer was just like a lightning-clad excavator. The body fluids and pieces of flesh of the monsters which was ran down, trampled and scorched, thickly filled the inside of the tunnel like a fog. Together on the carriage, it was as if Waver could not see his surroundings.

Riding alongside Rider at the coachman's box, if the protection field were not covering them, he would surely become not able to breathe, and would probably suffocate due to the splashing of blood from overflowing demons. In spite of that, the more he protected his breathing organs with magecraft shields, the more he had to block his sense of smell. If not, he would probably faint from the excessively heavy stench of intestines.

He thought they would be welcomed with some intricate and mysterious defense...but this time, the nest Caster established had nothing, but an enormous number of familiars positioned there; besides that, magecraft disguises or traps were completely absent. Compared with the standard of magi, this was neither a workshop nor anything else. It was just an ordinary “siege” used to position their army, to strengthen their defense.

Defense like this which only relied on the number of the small fries, was not a suitable prey for Servants furnished with Anti-Army Noble Phantasms. Therefore, for Rider, this was but a resistance-less turn of events, an anticlimax.

“Hey boy, you said “attacking the magus' workshop”, but it's just this childish thing?”

“……No, this is weird. This time, the Caster is probably not a proper magus.”

“Ah? What d'ya mean by that?”

“For example, in the legends during his lifetime, be it summoning demons, or possessing grimoires or that sort, with just that anecdote being passed down, and that person himself is not really a magus, contrary to what he is famous for, even if he were to be appear as Caster, won't that ability be something limited?”

After being made to shun his body senses for about a few minutes due to the shrieks of the creatures which were being ran down, Waver now raised his voice undauntedly against the sounds of the clamorous massacre, as he related at great length that carefree analysis, to the extent of his nerves getting numb.

“Generally, if this is the real workshop, such a defenseless discharging of thrash would be strange. If he were a decent magus, such a blunder is impossible.”

“Huuuh, so that's it? ……Hmm? Are we about to reach the end?”

The wall of flesh of the pulverized creatures which were trying in vain to block their path, had thinned down before they realized. Before long, there was no more tentacle left; and the chariot was released from the blood spray, springing into a wide space. Just like before, the surrounding was in pitch darkness, without even a ray of light. There was no flow of air as well, but they could no longer feel the oppressive feeling like when they were in that narrow, confined space.

“—Fuuun, unfortunately, Caster's not around...”

Probably, there was no problem for a Servant's eyesight even within this complete darkness. Rider coughed absent-mindedly. He had said that in a strangely low tone, probably because of his disappointment at letting the enemy escape, but at this time, Waver did not realize as well.

“A water tank? Or what is it? Here.....”

He had wanted a hand light, but if by any chance they would end up in a place where there were troops lying in ambush within this darkness, it would be something which informs them their direct position. It would be

great if he could enhance his vision with his magecraft skills and see through the darkness.

“……Ah, boy. I think it's better for you not to look.”

It was rare for Rider to be this frank. At his excuse which was as if there was something stuck in between his teeth, obviously Waver would become astonished.

“What are you talking about!? If Caster is not here, we have to at least find out some clue as to where he is!!”

“That's probably true but, oh well. Boy, that guy is too much for you.”

“Shut up!”

Becoming serious of the turn of events which were meant to be, Waver jumped down from the driver's seat of the chariot and stood on the floor and activated his night vision skill. Instantly, his field of vision opened up like a fog clearing up, and the spectacle ahead of him, which was masked by the darkness earlier, opened up as well.

Until the moment he tried to understand the situation around him, he had forgotten how he blocked the odor which had been hanging in the air of the sewer, even until here. He had been thinking all this while that the splashing sound of the water when he jumped onto the floor, was merely because of the sewage water.

“…Wh-what—”

Waver Velvet is a magus. He prepared his heart for every type of mystery whose reasoning were outside his ethics.

He knew that the ritual he was participating in now was one with unparalleled brutal murders, and thus, did not spare any sweet feeling towards them. If he had not conceptualized himself seeing dead bodies piling up, he would not have any tinge of hope of staying in this fight.

Because of that, Waver resolved to never be shaken, whatever the “death” which might spring out surprisingly into his sight. Because this Fuyuki is the battleground, it is natural to see dead bodies.

Even if their numbers were enormous, even if they were to be mutilated till losing their entire human appearance—in the end, corpses are still but corpses. He would frown at such goriness and atrocity, but there was nothing he could not tolerate.

He had been thinking about this. Until this very instant.

The limits of Waver's imagination were that corpses were but remains of human bodies in the end; nothing but the result of their destruction. However, the scene before his very eyes now, surpassed his previous thought completely.

As an illustration, that place was just like a variety shop.

There was furniture. There were clothes as well. Musical instruments; cutlery. Various items use of which were not understood at all; they probably were just pictures or artworks. The enthusiasm of the creator devoting himself completely into designing them diligently, and his profligate sense of fun could be perceived.

Unmistakably, the craftsman who made these ceaselessly loved his raw materials, and the manufacturing process itself.

They understood that there was someone who violently discovered pleasures. That might be the person who committed those murders. But the things in this blood-stained space were not corpses.

There wasn't a single “destroyed remains” here. Everything was a new creation; an art. Their lives as “human beings”, their carcass as “human beings” were completely discarded meaninglessly during the process of the art—that was the entirety of the slaughter at that place.

Murders which were done creatively to amuse himself; this behavior which created art by means of death, had far exceeded the maximum level Waver's mind could possibly take. Above simple emotions like horror and disgust, at such a graphically realistic and alarming shock, Waver could not even stand straight. Before he realized, he was already on the bloodstained floor on both his hands and knees, regurgitating all the contents of his stomach.

Rider descended from his chariot. Standing beside Waver, he sighed deeply.

“That's why, eh...I've asked you to stop, but...”

“Shut up!!”

At the gigantic Servant's coughing murmur—within his demoralized heart, the last bit of self-dignity was scattered into fire sparks.

His intense outburst of fury had no reason or logic whatsoever. Kneeling here, his weakness was detestable. Of all times, for this weakness to be revealed in front of his Servant was an utterly mortifying humiliation.

“Son of a bitch! Treating me as an idiot! Dammit!!”

“Now's not the time to get into temper. Idiot.”

Rider spat that out with a sigh, and yet, for some reason, he was not amazed, nor did he reproach Waver. Instead, his voice could be heard in a quiet, admonishing tone.

“It's okay, that's all for now. If there is someone who would not twitch and eyebrow even after being shown such a thing, I'll go and bash him.

Rather, I praise your decision, boy. The plan of bringing Caster and his Master down first is true indeed. Now I see, every second such people exist is disgusting.”

“……”

Although he was commended by Rider, Waver could not be honestly glad at all. The reason he set Caster as his target was to get the supplementary Command Spell shown by the supervisor as a reward. Obviously, he did not tell Rider that. That's because there would be no reason for a Servant to rejoice in the unnecessary increase of the Command Spells which bind them.

Among those words Rider said to Waver, none of them bear malice. And yet, Waver strongly loathed that towering Servant.

He did not show even the respectful attitude Servants normally have towards their Masters. On the contrary, he kept having this behavior of treating Waver as an idiot. If that was all, then it's still all right. But the thing which is most unforgivable was that- despite his rare attempts to praise Waver, at such moments, he had such irrelevant misunderstanding towards him.

“What are you hitting me for!? Idiot! Aren't you standing there unconcerned!? Am I not the only one who's ashamed!?”

Even though he was vomiting heavily until tears came out, with a furious voice, he snapped at Rider with all his might. At that, in an extremely troubled manner, Rider's mouth formed a “□” shape.

“For me, now's not the time to brace your emotions. That's because my master’s about to be killed.”

“…Eh?”

Not even having the free time to doubt what he heard, Rider's next move was executed with lightning speed.

He threw the Sword of Cypriot he removed from the sheath at his waist overhead, which gave off bright sparks in the empty space.

After that, riding on ahead with a bird-of-prey-like agility despite his big size, with the sword which returned to him, he took a swift slash.

The sound of meat being ripped apart and getting wet. A scream of agony and splatter of crimson red blood.

With utter disbelief, Waver was staring at the black-clothed corpse which had fallen over.

When on earth did that attacker steal up behind Waver? And then, since when did Rider sense that presence? As for the thing Rider's sword knocked off just now, it was something the shadow clothed in black aimed and threw at him- a Dark dagger. With the throw of that dagger, Rider was able to finally ascertain the exact position of the enemy. Within the instant he did not expect, this bloodstained water tank had already become a battlefield.

However, above everything else, the thing which stared bewilderedly at Waver was a white skull mask of the dark shadow which fell due to Rider's decapitation.

“Assassin……It can't be…”

It was an impossible mystery. That's because Waver had seen the defeat and annihilation of Assassin himself through the eyes of his familiar.

“Now's not the time to be shocked, boy.”

With his sword in readied, Rider quietly warned him. As if confronting the guy who was shielding Waver, in the darkness, two more white skull masks appeared.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Why!? ……Why are there four Assassins!?”

“No matter what it is, it's not the issue now.”

Facing such an obviously abnormal situation, Rider's attitude was still very composed.

No matter how fishy the course of events was, to him, the situation right now was his only concern.

“There is one thing which can definitely be said of this- Those who thought that THESE GUYS had died, have been deceived...”

Anyhow, Rider who was protecting Waver now, was not shaken at all. Perceiving that situation, the two Assassins clicked their tongues within their hearts regretfully.

In reality, to them, this turn of events was a completely inexcusable fiasco.

Apart from the two which were dispatched out, among the Assassins which were deployed to observe Caster and his master, Ryuunosuke, there were still three left outside the workshop, watching them all the time- these three people.

If possible, they had wanted to take the opportunity of Caster's absence to steal into the workshop to investigate the place. But since they did not know what was inside Caster's base, they had no choice but to be cautious. However, witnessing how Rider and his master who had appeared, foolishly attacking it head on from the front, the three of them decided that it was a great chance. Secretly pursuing them from the opening Rider made, they planned to find out the status of the defense of the workshop, if the situation permitted it.

Even so, Rider managed to reach the interior of the workshop without any trouble. So unexpectedly, the Assassins managed to penetrate Caster's base too. One of the Assassins who was satisfied with this unexpected turn of events became greedily obsessed. With the extremely defenseless Rider's Master ahead of them, he could not resist straying from their duty.

Obviously, it was a clear deviation from their Master, Kirei's instructions. Despite that, if they could successfully eliminate Rider here, they would probably not be reprimanded. To the Assassins, the situation was that attractive.

Eventually, the three agreed upon an extreme gamble. In the end, it was a superb failure.

Although the remaining two Assassins prudently discerned Rider's next move, they cast an asking glance at each other. Should they continue their two-on-one battle against Rider here.....

Without much contemplation, both of them had only one answer. Ever since the moment they lost their surprise attack, their chance of victory was already lost. Visually measuring the difference in strength between them and Rider, they had absolutely no chance of winning. They resented it but

retreating here and facing Kirei's wrath would be many times better than being slain here.

As soon as they mutually understood each other, both Assassins turned into spiritual form swiftly, and their figures disappeared from Rider's sight.

“They…escaped?”

“No,” Rider admonished Waver who had started to feel relieved.

“Although two had died, there are still two left. If this trend continues, we don't know how many more Assassins would come forth. This is a bad place. A terrain those guys like. We have to retreat immediately.”

Still not sheathing the sword, Rider hit Waver's chin, and pointed towards the chariot.

“Boy, get back to my chariot! Once we start off, the enemy won't have any chance to strike.”

“This place……should we leave it as it is?”

Pointing at the workshop which he was still timid to directly look at until now, Waver asked that in a gloomy voice.

“Although we might know something if we investigate further……give it up! For the time being, we'll just wreck this place whatever we can. Who knows if it might end up frustrating Caster's plans?”

With his attitude changing suddenly from just now when he trampled on the opposing demons outside the workshop, Rider was now more cautious. Although some part of him still wanted to advance on the grotesque-looking demonic beasts recklessly, the assassins' shadows which had drew near them without them noticing, had probably made him felt quite seriously threatened.

“Are there any survivors…”

Waver said that in a dim voice. After surveying the surrounding deliberately with a glance which penetrated the darkness, Rider shook his head with a bitter face.

“There are some of them who are still breathing, but……in that condition, it would be more merciful to kill them off.”

Waver did not feel brave enough to ask what Rider had seen within the dark.

Both of them boarded the driver's seat of the chariot again. Rider took up the reins, and the raging bulls bellowed angrily, sending lightning in the darkness.

“Sorry for the cramped space, but there's something I really count on you, Children of Zeus. Burn this place down to ashes!!”

Together with Rider's yell, the heavenly oxen stomped their hoofs, savagely going around the workshop which was stained with blood as if depicting a “□” (Yen) character. Once being trampled on by the hoofs which scorched even the air, the only thing left was utter destruction. The nightmarish handicrafts Caster and Ryuunosuke treasured so much were swept cleanly without any trace in the blink of an eye. Moreover, the chariot went about like this for two or three times, and nothing was left in the interior of the spacious water tank apart from the heavy stench of burned fat.

Surveying the aftermath of the sheer destruction, Waver's expression was still gloomy. Something like this would not bring about any solution at all. Having this miserable thought, the apprentice magus' heart squirmed.

With his big hand, Rider grimly gave Waver a gentle rub at his head.

“Wrecking his base like this, even if Caster escapes, he can't hide anywhere at all. After this, he might come out staggering, confused. Singing requiem for that guy doesn't sound too far-fetched, does it?”

“Wa- Got it! -Stop that!”

At that humiliating treatment which intentionally emphasized on his short stature, Waver cast away his sad look and became exasperated. While laughing boldly, Rider pulled at his bridle, and they sped back to the sewer.

Dashing out of that narrow tunnel into the river surface of the Mion river under the night sky took only a little time. Savoring the clean, chilly air outside as if it had been a long time, the relieved feeling finally calmed Waver's nerves down.

“Oh my, what a stinky place that was. Tonight, I want to have a grand booze to get these feelings off my chest!”

“……Let me get this straight first. I won't accompany you in drinking.”

Or rather, he couldn't drink. Every time, even by merely sitting beside Rider watching him drink sake, Waver would feel sick at the strong odor of alcohol.

“Hmph, I'm not even expecting this chick-like you to accompany me! Aaaahhh~ Boring! Isn't there any riverbank where I can get happily drunk? ……Oooh, that's it!”

Pomp!! Rider clapped his hands together knowingly.

Waver had absolutely no idea what that meant, but he had a really bad feeling about it.

-105:57:00

Tōsaka Rin was prepared.

Since she was the inheritor of a family of magi, she was bound to walk a path different from that of ordinary girls.

There was a very good example beside her: the greatest, most handsome, and most gentle adult she ever knew.

In her eyes, her father Tokiomi was nearly a perfect human. Although many girls her age also admire their fathers, Rin believed no other daughter would love her father as deeply as she did.

To become a singer when she grows up, to become a beautiful bride when she grows up – girls Rin’s age perhaps all harbor such wishes, but Rin’s wish was different.

Things like occupation are second-only on her list; her biggest wish was to become someone as great as her father.

That is to say, choosing the road her father was walking, choosing to accept the destiny that her father accepted. In other words – to inherit and continue the Tōsaka’s blood of magecraft.

But that was only a wish, not something that would come true just by hoping so. Firstly, she has to get the permission of her teacher, her father. She was rather anxious about the fact that her father hadn’t yet expressed the wish of entrusting the family to Rin in the future. Maybe her father hadn’t acknowledged she has the aptitude to become a magus.

But even so, her wish had never changed, so she felt proud of the preparedness she had made.

Of course, Rin knew far more about what was currently happening in Fuyuki city than her classmates. Although she still couldn't comprehend it as profoundly as her parents, she knew more truths than most ordinary people on the street.

Seven magi, her father included, were undertaking a war.

Fatal and unearthly threats lurked in the night streets.

Because she knew some truths, Rin's heart felt a particular sense of responsibility.

Her friend Kotone didn't come to school yesterday or today.

The homeroom teacher said she was sick at home, but the rumor spreading in the class was different.

Even when Rin called her house, her parents didn't want to deal with Rin.

Nowadays abductions of children were occurring repeatedly in Fuyuki and they can't be solved with simple investigations alone. Even if people report it to the police, it is very unlikely the children will come back. The teachers at school and Kotone's family and friends certainly didn't not realize this, except Rin.

Kotone had always trusted Rin very much. Rin would always stand up for Kotone, be it when she was bullied by boys in their class or when the librarian forced work onto her. Rin was proud of being so trusted and respected by her classmate. "Always maintain your elegance" – it was a good opportunity for Rin to put the family creed into action whenever she helped Kotone.

Right now, Kotone must also be waiting for Rin to go and save her.

In fact, she could have asked her magus father for help, but her father was one of the participants of the "war" and didn't call back since he moved to the house in Miyama last month. Also, her mother strictly ordered her not to disturb her father.

With a tone that was like saying "never go out at night".

Rin had always obeyed her parents' words, but she couldn't leave a friend who was in a dangerous situation.

And then - no matter what, she only had to go through one sleepless night.

Actually, back then Rin only knew parts of the truth, and her mind was not yet mature.

Unknown to her, whether due to her sense of duty or the so-called conscience’s call, she was brought into an area that she should never had stepped in, while she herself didn’t realize it at all at that time.

Compared to the Tōsaka house, tightly surrounded with bounded fields, it was all too easily escaping from her room in the Zenjō house.

Climb out of the bedroom window, slide down the balcony pillar into the garden, then get outside the fence through the back door.

She took barely five minutes to come out, but she can’t use the same route when she comes back. It’s easy to slide down the balcony pillar but far too hard to climb back up.

When she thought it would be impossible to hide the fact that she sneaked out tonight and her parents are bound to scold her harshly, Rin told herself it wasn’t for something shameful that she sneaked out but she had to do this because she is someone of the Tōsaka family. She would definitely bring Kotone back with her when she returns. Then, no matter how bad her parents might scold her, she would feel proud about herself in her own heart.

She was armed with three things.

The most trustworthy was the magecraft compass her father gave to her on her birthday. It looked like an ordinary compass from its shape and structure, but it wouldn’t point towards the north and point towards the direction where strong amounts of prana emanate out instead. Rin had experimented with it, and neither wind nor water could change the detection of small movements of prana. If something abnormal happens, this would undoubtedly be the most useful.

The rest were two pieces of crystal that Rin specially crafted while she practiced jewel magecraft. She picked the two-best works from her completed ones. If all the prana stored in them were to be released at once – although she’s never tried something so dangerous – it would probably

cause a small explosion. It can be a weapon of self-defense in the face of danger.

With this equipment, and together with her own strength, Rin believed she would definitely find Kotone and bring her back.

If someone was to ask her, will everything be alright? She would definitely nod her head.

If someone was to ask, will everything really be alright? Then she might nod rather hesitantly.

And if someone was to ask, can she really be certain that not a single mistake will be made – then even she herself would probably not dare to reply.

Actually, this question doesn't hold much meaning for Rin. If someone was really going to ask anything then they should firstly ask would Kotone be alright, and would Rin manage if Kotone never come to school again? If she was posed with such questions, she would definitely reply immediately and without a doubt.

Gathering her courage and pride, Rin told herself she's not like those fearful normal children. She chased away the cowardice in her heart and started to walk towards the closest cable car station. Fuyuki Shinto is only one station away, and the change she had were just enough for the ticket.

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She did miss the Fuyuki night air. The icy cold scent of winter was just the right thing to cool down her burning hot skin.

Rin naively thought it would be great if she can find Kotone before the final cable car of the night. But that would leave her with only two hours, and that wouldn't be enough time at all.

Firstly, she'll investigate Shinto. If she went to Miyama the magecraft compass would just point straight towards the Tōsaka house, and if she went there it's very possible her father would discover her.

Judging by adult standards, it was not yet midnight, but the amount of people on the street was pitifully small. Normally when she was going home

office workers would be rushing about, and even at night lively groups of people still throbbed on the street.

Rin was dumbfounded by the reaction of the compass needle after she opened the lid of the magecraft compass.

“… What’s this?”

The needle, which normally wavered just a little, was rapidly spinning in circles. It was the first time she saw this kind of phenomenon. This reaction, as if of a confused little animal, made a shadow pass across Rin’s heart.

But it wouldn’t be the best idea to just stand here. The few adults who just walked by already gave questioning looks to Rin, who was standing alone. Let’s just start walking first.

The further she walked; the sparser people became. Is this really the Fuyuki city she’s so used to? Rin felt a faint chill creeping up her entire body.

Actually, Fuyuki city had already imposed a curfew. Strange murders and abductions have been happening recently and last night even a series of explosions, made for terrorism purposes, occurred at Shinto and the harbor district. The police were urging citizens to go out less often at night, and the smart ones have all obeyed this command.

But even if there were no curfews, there shouldn’t be many citizens who still liked to wonder at night. Nowadays something unwholesome was lurking in the Shinto night; human instincts would have already detected this.

“– Aa, as I thought.”

The red police light lit up further down the street and Rin hid in the shadow of a building in fright. The patrolling police car was driving slowly, searching for any citizen who was walking alone at night. There was no way the police would leave her alone if they see her, and if that happens, she wouldn’t be able to go save Kotone.

Rin finally relaxed as she watched the light move slowly away –

Clack.

– Rin swallowed the scream she almost yelled out.

That sound just then came from the depth of the alleyway by the house she was hiding next to, and it’s probably a stray cat sifting through the rubbish

and knocked over some cans. But it’s hard to determine if someone was there.

Rin drew a sharp breath when she looked down on the magecraft compass in her hands.

Unmoving, as if frozen in place, the needle pointed straight towards the direction of the sound.

Something was there; something that emanated unnatural prana was there.

“…”

Isn’t this the result you're waiting anxiously for?

You've already gotten some response from your investigation. Isn't that a sign of a good start?

Rin planned to go through all suspicious spots in Shinto and check Kotone’s presence one by one. Here, the first place she checked, already has something.

Come now, let's step into the inside of the alley and check what's there.

“No!”

Maybe there are some clues about Kotone right there. Or maybe, Kotone herself is there.

“Absolutely not!”

There's no reason to hesitate. If not, there would be no meaning coming this far. You are not a coward. You would not do things such as abandoning your friend as well. That's because you are one of the Tōsaka with a long and distinguished history. So, you have to prove that you're brave and can become your great father's successor.

“No no no absolutely not no no no no noooooo…!”

A wet sound could be heard. *Splash, splash*, *something* lurking at the deep inside the alley was breathing, as if sneering her, creeping towards her.

Rin finally realized that this journey of exploration, aimed to recover her best friend, was definitely not as easy to complete as she thought.

Kotone’s figure wasn’t in the depth of the darkness.

Even if she was in there, she wouldn’t be the same Kotone as before.

If she was thinking of finding Kotone in the darkness of Shinto, from the start, Rin should have aimed to find Kotone's ████ ████ instead.

“NO!!”

In fact, Tōsaka Rin possessed excellent aptitude to be a magus.

She had never seen a demon, nor had she been touched by one, but from mere instinct she could tell she was in a very dangerous situation right now.

To study magecraft, the first thing one need to do is to learn to accept and know death – this is the first lesson of every apprentice magus.

That inescapable, incomprehensible, purely despairing feel of ‘death’.

On that day, little Rin felt the essence of magecraft from that experience.

She couldn’t move; she couldn’t even yell. A terror unbearable to ordinary humans was more than enough to crush such a young girl.

Strange buzzing sounds started by her ears, and Rin thought it was triggered by the icy cold despair pressing down on her heart.

Her thoughts were probably starting to destroy her five senses’ perception.

A humming started, monotonous yet maniacal, as if a swamp of giant wasps were raiding towards her…

The buzzing became steadily louder. *It was approaching her.*

In the blink of an eye, the stuff on top of Rin’s head rushed inward like a cover of black fog.

That thing quickly passed above Rin like a turbid current, striking the depth of the darkness in a split second.

And then those bloodcurdling screams sounded without end, screams that sounded like boiling a cat alive in a pot of hot water – but it was definitely not the sound of a cat.

This was already the limit of Rin’s endurance.

Her sight dimmed, and her footsteps faltered. The moment before she was about to fall, someone took her in his hands.

In front of her eyes was a monster with only the left side of his face visible.

That face, ugly beyond description, was embedded with a dim and lightless eyeball.

But his right eye eluded a deep loneliness and melancholy.

I think I have seen this expression somewhere before...

Rin thought so before she lost consciousness.

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An hour later, Tōsaka Aoi finally discovered her daughter had disappeared.

Probably afraid of her mother’s scolding, the child put a note beside her bed, and wrote she was going to find her lost classmate Kotone.

Aoi was immediately overwhelmed with regret. Rin mentioned Kotone during dinner, and questioned Aoi about Fuyuki’s current situation.

Back then, Aoi thought she shouldn’t hide anything about it, so she said bluntly – "Forget this friend already."

Tokiomi should be informed – but this thought was immediately damped down by her conscience.

Aoi didn’t know magecraft but she was, after all, a magus’s wife. She knew very well her husband didn’t have time to worry about his daughter. Her husband was still at the battlefield, and he had already placed his life and all his stamina on the battle.

The only one who could protect Rin now was Aoi herself.

Aoi ran out of the Zenjō house wearing only her household clothes and galloped on the night state highway with her car.

Since she didn’t know exactly where Rin went, then she could only guess her range of movement and check the places she might go to one by one.

If starting at her house and take the cable car, the first stop would be the Fuyuki city stop in Shinto, then walk for thirty minutes with a child's speed, the approximate distance would be…

The first place Aoi thought of was the public park beside the river.

The silent park easily reminded her of a graveyard.

On the plaza barren of people, the dim light of the streetlamps enriched the darkness and quietness with a sinister sheen.

Fuyuki city's night air was markedly corrupted. Living with a magus and having gotten used to many odd events, Aoi immediately discovered this.

At once, Aoi looked towards the bench she used to sit at when she brought Rin here to play. It was probably an instinctive feeling out of the blue.

However, the little figure clad in a red coat that she was looking for was right there.

"– Rin!"

Aoi lost her composure and rushed up with a yell. Rin was unconscious and lay unmoving on the bench.

Aoi took her up and felt her even breathing and warm body temperature. There appeared to be no external wounds and she looked like she was just sleeping. Aoi finally cried in reassurance.

"Thank goodness… truly…"

Who should she thank? Aoi, full of joy, finally calmed down. Suddenly she realized someone was looking at her. Turning her head, she noticed someone was looking at the pair of mother and daughter from the bushes behind the bench.

"Who's there?"

Aoi yelled with a stiff tone. Contrary to what she expected, the figure moved to stand beneath the light of the streetlamps without hesitation.

It was a man wearing a large winter coat and had a scarf wrapped around his face. His left leg seemed to be wounded and scuffed as he walked.

"I thought I would definitely see you if I wait here."

The mysterious man finally opened his mouth and gasped. He seemed to be a terminal lung cancer patient who felt painful even with breathing and heaved heavy huffs. However, his tone was surprisingly elegant and soft.

Although his throat was already ruined, Aoi felt this voice was familiar.

“…Kariya-kun…”

The figure stopped. After a temporary hesitation, he finally took off the scarf and showed his true face.

Lifeless white hair as if it was withering, the left side of his face frozen and expressionless; it was a very terrifying face.

Although Aoi wanted to restrain her cowardly wails, she failed. Kariya laughed deplorably with the remaining right side of his face.

“This is the magecraft of the Matōs. It needs me to offer my flesh, corrode my life… a thaumaturgy that can only be achieved by using this as the price.”

“What? What’s going on? How come you are here?”

Slightly confused, Aoi asked the childhood sweetheart in front of her continuously. But Kariya didn’t answer any questions, and just continued on the previous topic with a gentle tone.

“But, Sakura-Chan is fine. Before she becomes like this as well… I must save her and take her out.”

“Sakura –”

This was the forbidden word that the Tōsaka family never mentioned in one year. The uncontrollable pain of separation was suddenly flooding Aoi’s heart.

Sakura – the Tōsaka daughter sent to the Matō family.

Speaking of it, wasn’t it exactly a year ago when Kariya saw Aoi last?

“All Zōken wants is the Holy Grail. He promised me he’d release Sakura-Chan as long as I help him get the Holy Grail.”

The “Holy Grail” Kariya spoke of made Aoi feel an evil chill from nowhere.

Aoi prayed that she heard it wrong, but Kariya stretched out his right hand as if betraying Aoi's heart. On the back of his hand, three engraved Command Seals could clearly be seen.

"Therefore, I'll definitely do so… don't worry, my Servant is the strongest; he won't lose to anyone."

"Ah – why –"

Terror, sadness, and a large amount of confusion made Aoi at a loss for words.

Kariya returned to the Matō family and led his Servant to participate in the Heaven's Feel.

This means her husband and her childhood sweetheart were about to unleash an extraordinary gruesome slaughter between each other.

"… Oh God…"

Kariya ignored Aoi's lament; he took the meaning of the tears seeping out of her eyes the wrong way.

"Right now, Sakura-Chan doesn't even want to have hope. So… you must take that child's place. Aoi, you need to believe instead, pray instead of her. Pray for my victory and Sakura's future."

The left eye, hollow as the dead, glared at Aoi as if cursing her.

The right eye, belonging to the gentle old friend, gazed at Aoi as if begging her.

"Kariya-kun, do you…"

Want to die?

Want to kill Tokiomi and die?

Aoi couldn't ask that. Despair rooted deeply in her heart.

Aoi lowered her head and held Rin tightly to her chest. It was the only thing she could do right now to escape this cruel reality.

Aoi's eyes were clutched tightly shut. Kariya's gentle and agonized voice sounded beside her ears.

“One day, we’d come here to play like before. Rin-Chan and Sakura-Chan would return to be a pair of good sisters like before… so, Aoi, don’t cry anymore.”

“Kariya-kun, wait –”

But Kariya had no answer to this final call; he walked slowly away, dragging his destroyed left leg. Aoi didn’t have the courage to follow him. Right now, she could only cry alone with her daughter in her arms.

Her motherly tears dropped on Rin’s sweetly sleeping face.

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In the darkness, a few Assassins traversed in silence, moving to report everything they’ve gathered to Kirei.

“Is it appropriate to just leave Tōsaka Tokiomi’s daughter like this?”

“– No problem, just go tail Berserker’s Master.”

“Yes –”

Although they took on this job, none of the Assassins could figure out what good this kind of surveillance would do for the War of the Holy Grail.

From yesterday onwards, more strange requirements appeared in Master Kirei’s commands. He asked the Assassins who spied on the five enemy master’s to carefully observe the Masters’ private lives, interests, and appearances and report them. The density of the Assassins’ surveillance scattered around Fuyuki would also be raised. Right now, in the darkness of the night, there must be Hassan’s hiding everywhere obeying their master’s command.

Anyways, since it’s a command then they should obey. Although it’s a bother to carry out, it’s not too difficult so there’s nothing much to complain about.

The Assassins galloped in the thickness of night, continuing to follow Matō Kariya.

-103:11:39

Night once again descended on the Einzbern forest.

The night was still pitch dark and serene, but the signs of battle scattered all around was still evidently visible.

The castle that was specially tidied by the maids she brought over from her own country was also severely damaged in the battle between Emiya Kiritsugu and Lord El-Melloi. Even if she wanted to fix it, the maids in charge of chores had returned to their country. Irisviel sighed as she traversed the corridors, doing her best to ignore this ruinous scene.

Luckily, a few bedrooms were spared, and currently Hisau Maiya was resting in one of them. Although Irisviel had already performed healing magecraft on her, the Einzbern healing magecraft is an extremely large burden to the wounded after all. This is because it is adopted from alchemy and does not cause the injured body to regenerate but use magecraft to create new tissue and use that for grafting.

That was the only thing she could do for now. It wouldn't matter if the patient is a homunculus, but since she was healing humans it would count as a major operation similar to an organ transplant in modern medicine.

Exhausted, Maiya was deep asleep. It would take a very long recovery time for her to regain consciousness and move her body.

When Irisviel thought that Saber was protecting her she felt worse for Maiya, who was heavily wounded. However, considering her importance in the Heaven's Feel, then undoubtedly Irisviel would be protected with priority. That's an undeniable fact. Feeling painful for her wounded friend would have to be her naive sentimentality.

Meanwhile, Kiritsugu left immediately after he sent the injured Maiya back and still hadn't returned. He didn't even tell Irisviel and Saber his destination – perhaps he went to chase Kayneth El-Melloi, who had escaped. Irisviel had already detected that the enemy magus wasn't successfully killed because of Saber. However, Kiritsugu didn't get angry with nor blame Saber, but left coldly and without her. It's hard to tell if he did it due to a reluctance to wound her pride, but the gulf between these two were getting bigger and bigger and it was already becoming very hard to reconcile them.

Troubled with the relationship between her husband and the King of Knights, Irisviel sighed deeply. Suddenly, a thunderous roar sounded beside

her ears. Not only so, but this roar that tore apart the night created a gigantic burden for her Magic Circuits; the dizziness almost made Irisviel faint in the colonnade.

The roar came from a nearby thunder, and the prana impact that followed it meant the bounded field in the forest outside the castle was already under attack. Although a bounded field isn't something that can be easily destroyed, her magecraft had already been damaged. "What's going on… a frontal charge?"

A pair of strong arms held up Irisviel's shoulders; they were Saber's arms, who immediately appeared beside her when this strange change occurred.

"Are you alright, Irisviel?"

"Yeah, just scared. I didn't think such a rude guest would visit."

"I'll go out to greet him, you stay beside me."

Irisviel nodded upon hearing this. Staying beside Saber, who was going out to take in the attack, meant she herself must also face the enemy. However, the battlefield is the safest place for Irisviel, because the strongest Servant is right beside her.

Quickening her steps, Irisviel followed behind Saber. The two of them galloped through the tragically ruined castle; their destination was the terrace outside of the door. Since the opponent was attacking from the front, they should be able to meet him there.

"The thunder just then, and this senseless tactic… the opponent should be Rider."

"I think so too."

Irisviel remembered the overwhelming power of the Noble Phantasm 'Gordius Wheel' she witnessed a few days ago at the warehouse street. The chariot entwined with thunder and pulled by divine bulls – if that type of anti-army Noble Phantasm were to release all of its power, it could easily destroy the magecraft focal points placed in the forest. It wouldn't matter too much if the bounded field was whole to begin with, but it had yet to recover from Caster and Kayneth's attacks a few days ago.

"Oi, King of Knights! I especially came to meet you, come out, aye?"

This sound came from the main hall; it looks like the other party had already entered the door. Without a doubt, the enemy was the King of

Conquerors, Alexander. Judging by his powerful and reverberating call, his tone was not like a warrior about to fight.

But Saber didn't dare to be slack; she materialized her silver armor as she ran.

Irisviel and Saber finally went past the corridors and came to the terrace… but when the two of them saw, by the moonlight shining through the skylight, the enemy Servant standing in the hall with his chest puffed out, they didn't know what to say.

"…"

"Yo, Saber. I wanted to have a look after I heard about the castle here – what happened to it, aye?"

Not apologetic at all, Rider smiled, baring his teeth; then he flexed his neck, pretending to be serious.

"It's difficult to get in and out of the house if you have too many trees in the garden. I almost got lost before I arrived at the door, so I cut some down for you. Thanks to me, the view is much better."

"Rider, you…"

Saber said severely. But faced with this enemy who always made his opponent to be at a loss, she didn't know what to say next. It was Rider who furrowed his brows in surprise and said:

"Oi King of Knights, aren't you going to wear something modern tonight? Don't just always wear that old-fashioned armor."

If Saber's armor-clad form was to be regarded as old-fashioned, then how would Rider's attire of jeans and T-shirt be judged? If this armor is considered to be Saber's pride, but the cracks on the thick breastplate was as if hinting upon its weaknesses. Perhaps, the only thing we could say here is 'the ignorant is indefeasible'.

Waver was half hiding behind Rider's giant torso and looking up towards Irisviel, and it was hard to tell if his expression was one of enmity or terror. Undoubtedly, his face plainly showed he wanted to go home, and quickly too.

Once upon a time, King Alexander took the lead in wearing Asiatic clothing due to his interest in the cultures of his conquered land and caused his followers to avert him like the plague. Irisviel had heard of this story, but

she would never have known that the reason Rider changed into modern attire was because of Saber and the suit she wore.

What made them more confused was the thing in Rider's hand; it wasn't a weapon or anything else used in battle.

It was a casket.

No matter how they look at it, it still appears to be a red wooden wine casket. Rider, who easily carried the casket under his arm, looked just like a wine shop owner coming to deliver his stock.

"You…"

Saber, once again at a loss for words, took a deep breath and said calmly.

"Rider, what are you doing here?"

"You can't tell by looks? I'm going to drink with you – oi, stop standing there like a stick and lead the way. Is there a courtyard here fitting for a banquet? We can't do with this castle, way too dusty inside."

"…"

Saber sighed helplessly, and the anger piled up in her chest also disappeared. Faced with this opponent who appears to have no ill-intent whatsoever, she found it impossible to keep up her fighting spirit.

"Irisviel, what do we do?"

Irisviel was similarly befuddled.

She was angry at the destruction of the forest's bounded field, but there's no way she'd manage to continue to hate him once she saw his grinning face.

"He's not the kind of person who'd set a trap; could it be he really wants to drink?"

Rider once said he would obey the contract sealed by the Heroic Spirits' pride and honor and pronounce his challenge after Saber and Lancer had decided the victor among them. Therefore, his sudden appearance tonight was truly incomprehensible.

"Could that man be trying to placate Saber?"

“No, this is a challenge.”

Saber, who should have lost her will to fight, suddenly became solemn for no reason.

“Challenge?”

“Yes… I am a king, and he is also a king. If we are to find the victor on the drinking table, then that is a ‘battle’ without bloodshed.”

Hearing Saber’s words, the King of Conquerors nodded with a smile.

“Hohoho, it’s good that you understand. Since we can’t oppose each other with swords, then let’s battle with wine. King of Knights, I won’t go easy on you tonight. Be prepared.”

“Interesting. I accept.”

Saber, replying resolutely, emanated the sharp battle vigor as if she was facing a battlefield. Only then did Irisviel realize this was not a joke, but a true ‘battle’.

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The place of the banquet was chosen to be the parterre in the castle’s central courtyard. The battle last night didn’t affect this place, and it wasn’t frugal to welcome a guest here. By now, no one paid attention to the coldness of the outside air.

Rider brought the casket to the central courtyard, and the two Servants sat opposite each other with ease. Irisviel and Waver sat aside, next to each other. As they tried to guess the progression of events, they realized they were in a temporary truce, and all they needed to do was stay aside and watch.

Rider shattered the lid of the casket with his fist; the musky fragrance of rice wine immediately filled the air of the courtyard.

“Although this is shaped oddly, it’s the goblet unique to this country.”

Rider happily scooped up some wine with the long bamboo ladle. Unfortunately, no one present pointed out the error in his common sense.

Rider firstly drained the wine in the ladle with one gulp, then spoke:

“I heard that only those who are worthy are able to obtain the Holy Grail.”

The solemn tone made the atmosphere quietened down. Something must be up if this man is speaking in this tone of voice.

“And the ceremony of choosing the worthy one is this battle conducted at Fuyuki – however, if we’re only onlookers, there’ll be no need of bloodshed. As Heroic Spirits, if we can mutually acknowledge each other’s strength… I don’t need to say anymore after this, do I?”

“…”

Without hesitation, Saber took the long ladle Rider passed to her, and also scooped up a full measure of wine.

Saber’s slender body made others worry if she could really drink liquor. However, her forthrightness with the drink wasn’t in any ways lacking compared to the giant Rider. Seeing this, Rider happily praised her.

“So, firstly you are going to compete with me to see who’s stronger, Rider?”

“Exactly. Going through a true competition in the name of kingship. But we can’t call this ‘the War of the Holy Grail’, better if we call it ‘Quiz of the Holy Grail’… At the end, between the King of Knights and the King of Conquerors, who would become ‘the King of the Holy Grail’? It’s best fit to ask the wine goblet such a question.”

Rider did a U-turn from his previously solemn tone, laughing as if pulling a prank. Then he started speaking as if to himself.

“Ah, speaking of, there is another guy here who calls himself ‘king’.”

“– The joke stops here, mongrel.”

As if responding to Rider’s vague words, a blinding golden light flashed into being in front of those present.

That sound and light made Saber and Irisviel tense up.

“Archer, why are you here…”

Saber demanded angrily, but the one replying was the impassive Rider.

“Ah, when I saw him on the streets, I asked him to drink together – but you’re still late, Goldy. However, he’s different from me; he walked here, so it’s not all his fault.”

Archer, in full armor, glared haughtily at Rider with burning ruby-like pair of eyes.

“Trust you to choose this cruddy place to conduct a banquet; this is probably as tasteful as you can get. How are you going to repay your sins of getting me to come all the way here?”

“Don’t say that. Come, have a drink first.”

Laughing heartily, Rider passed the wine-filled ladle to Archer.

People thought he would be angered by Rider’s attitude, but surprisingly he outright took the ladle and downed all the wine in one gulp.

Irisviel remembered the ‘challenge’ Saber spoke of before.

Archer. Since this anonymous golden Heroic Spirit calls himself ‘king’, then he couldn’t refuse the wine Rider passed to him.

“– What kind of cheap wine is this? How can you use this kind of wine to conduct a fight between heroes?”

Archer said with repulsion written all over his face.

“Really? I bought it from the market here; it’s pretty fine wine.”

“You only think so because you don’t know anything about wine, you mongrel.”

Beside Archer, who dismissed the wine derisively, ripples appeared in the empty air. That was the harbinger of the strange event that can summon Noble Phantasms; Waver and Irisviel felt a chill running down their spines.

– But what appeared beside Archer tonight weren’t weapons; instead it was a set of wine bottles inset with sparkling gems. Colorless lucid liquid filled bottles made of heavy gold.

“Behold, this is what ‘the king's wine’ should be.”

“Oh, many thanks.”

Rider didn’t mind Archer’s tone at all and happily poured the new wine into three cups.

Saber was still on her guard against Archer, whose identity she still didn't know. She looked at the wine in the golden bottle hesitantly, but still took the cup passed to her.

“Wow, delicious!”

Rider took a small sip, and immediately complimented it with wide open eyes. This time, even Saber’s curiosity was raised. This wasn’t originally a contest of manner, but a competition undertaken with wine.

When the wine flowed down her throat, all Saber felt was a strong swelling sensation in her head. It was indeed a good wine that she’s never tasted before. Fiery and clear, mellow and invigorating, the pungent fragrance filled her nose, and her entire body felt like it was floating.

“Fabulous. This is definitely not wine brewed by humans; is this the drink of gods?”

Looking at Rider, who lavished praises, Archer displayed a leisurely smile. He was already sitting down, twirling the cup in his hand satisfactorily.

“Of course. Whether wines or swords, only the best is stored in my treasury – With this, seems like my grade as a king has already been decided.”

“Stop the jokes, Archer.”

Saber roared. The silence was broken by a tense and intimidating atmosphere.

“I’m sick of listening to you bragging about your wine collection. You’re not like a king, but rather, a clown.”

Archer sneered as he looked at Saber, who was all worked up.

“How unmannerly; someone who doesn’t even know wine isn’t fit to be king at all.”

“Enough. You two are so tiresome.”

Rider smiled helplessly and signaled at Saber, who still wanted to say something, to be quiet; then he turned and continued with the previous topic.

“Archer, this greatest of wines you have does indeed deserve to be only contained in the most prized of all cups – but unfortunately, the Holy Grail isn’t made to contain wine. Now we’re going to have a quiz of the Holy Grail to determine if one among us is indeed worthy of having the Holy Grail. Firstly, you need to tell us why you want the Grail. Archer, as a king, try to convince us you and no one else are the person worthy of gaining the Grail.”

“You’re so irritating. Firstly, we’re going to ‘compete’ for the Holy Grail. I’m afraid your question is too far removed from this premise.”

“Huh?”

Seeing Rider lifting his brows confusedly and with surprise, Archer sighed resignedly.

“It is something that should be in my possession to start with. All the treasures in the world originate from my collection. However, because much time passed, it disappeared from my treasury. But I am still its owner.”

“So, you’re saying you once had the Holy Grail? You know what it is?”

“No.”

Archer evenly negated Rider’s question.

“It’s not something you can understand. The total amount of my wealth even exceeded my knowing, but as long as it’s a ‘treasure’ then it’d obviously belong to me. You should have more sense than trying to rob my treasure away.”

Now it was Saber who was speechless.

“Your speech isn’t too different from Caster’s; looks like he’s not the only demented Servant here.”

“Oi, what’s up with those words of yours?”

Different from Saber, Rider mumbled as if supporting the situation. Unknown to others, he had already picked up the bottle again and poured into his cup without care.

“Speaking of which, I think I know your true name now. There should only be one person who’s even haughtier than Alexander.”

Irisviel and Waver immediately focused on his words, but Rider changed the topic.

“Then Archer, you’re saying that we can obtain the Holy Grail if you agree to it?”

“Of course, but I have no reason to reward rats such as you.”

“Could it be that you can’t afford it?”

“Of course not. I only reward my subjects and my people.”

Archer smiled mockingly towards Rider.

“Rider, if you would like to become my subject, then I wouldn’t mind giving you a cup or two.”

“… Ah, now that’s actually impossible.”

Rider scratched his jaw and seems to feel that the opponent’s conditions are truly too unreachable, and decisively turned his head.

“But Archer, you actually don’t care if you have the Grail or not, right? It’s not like you’re competing for the Grail because you’re trying to fulfil some wish.”

“Of course. But I can’t let go of the guy who robs away my treasure; this is a matter of principles.”

“That’s to say –”

Rider drained the wine in his cup.

“That is to say what? Could there be some cause and reason?”

“It’s the law.”

Archer replied immediately.

“The law I set down as the king.”

“Hm.”

Rider seemed to have understood his words and took a deep sigh.

“Such a perfect king, able to stick to the laws he set down himself. However, I still want the Holy Grail very much. My way is that if I want something, I’ll get it by force; that’s because I, Alexander, am the King of Conquerors.”

“Not necessarily. If you invade, I’ll punish; there’s no room for negotiations.”

“Then we can only meet on the battlefield.”

With a solemn face, Archer nodded at the same time with Rider.

“– But Archer, let’s drink first and leave the business of battle till later.”

“Sure, unless you don’t think much of the wine, I brought at all.”

“Nonsense, how can I bear to not drink such delicious liquor?”

At this moment, Saber could no longer tell if Archer and Rider were friends or foe; she merely sat aside, looking at the two. After a short while, she finally opened her mouth towards Rider.

“King of Conquerors, since you’ve already admitted that the Holy Grail is owned by someone else, you’re still going to take it by force?”

“– Huh? Obviously. My belief is ‘conquest’… which is ‘taking’ and ‘invade’.”

Suppressing the anger in her heart, Saber continued to ask:

“Then why do you want the Holy Grail?”

Unexpectedly, Rider smiled rather shyly. He replied after taking a sip of wine:

“I want to be human.”

It was such an unexpected answer. Even Waver yelled out, and then screamed almost hysterically.

“Owww, you! Could it be you still want to conquer this world – waaaa!”

After forcing his Master to quiet down with a finger flick, Rider shrugged his shoulders.

“Idiot, how can I conquer the world in one lifetime? Conquest is my dream, and I can only bequest this first step to the Holy Grail.”

“Mongrel… you’re challenging me with such a silly wish?”

Even Archer was helpless with this, but Rider became more serious and continued:

“Say, even when we appear in the current era due to prana, we are still Servants at the end. We originally do not exist in this world – although it feels a bit ridiculous, but are you really satisfied with just that?”

“I’m not satisfied. I want to be reincarnated into this world and live on as a human.”

“…”

Thinking back – Waver originally thought Rider’s stubbornness in refusing to exist in spiritual form, and insist in physical form, is an odd habit of his. Indeed, although Servants can talk, dress, and eat like humans, their true essences aren’t too far from ghosts.

“Why… do you want a body so much?”

“Because that is the cornerstone of ‘conquest’.”

Alexander muttered as he stared at his own tightly clutched fist.

“Possessing a body, marching out towards the ends of the earth, carrying out my conquest – that is truly my way of kingship. But right now, I don’t have a body; that won’t do. Without a body nothing can start anew. I’m not afraid of anything much; I just feel that I must have a body of flesh and bone.”

As if diligently listening to Rider’s words, Archer just silently sipped his wine throughout this. Upon close inspection, one could discover he had a strange expression on his face at this moment, an expression different from his usual ones. It may be far-fetched to describe it as a smile, but compared to his usual sneer, this smile now encompassed a particularly sinister sheen.

“I’ve decided – Rider, I’ll kill you with my own hands.”

“Hahaha, saying those things even now. You’d better be prepared early as well. Leaving the Grail aside, I’m also planning to plunder your treasury too. Letting the King of Conquerors taste such delicious wine is really thoughtless of you.”

Rider roared into brutal laughter. But there was still one person here who was attending this banquet and hadn’t shown a sliver of a smile yet.

Saber, attending this banquet, didn't find a place to join in Archer and Rider's conversation throughout it. The way of kingship these two talked about is far removed from that she believed, so she and them don't have any common topics at all.

Only according to your own will –

This isn't a thought that the king should have. For Saber, who believed in incorruptness, Archer and Rider were just tyrants.

No matter how mighty the opponent might be, the unwavering battle vigor will continue to burn inside Saber's heart.

Only these two are enemies she must not lose to. She must never let the Grail fall into their hands. Archer's words were senseless, and Rider's wish can only be regarded as the wish of a fighter. Moreover, it was just the beginning of all the desires of men. Compared to their wishes, the wish Saber harbors has got to be nobler.

"– Oi, say, Saber, talk about your wish too."

Rider finally turned to Saber. No matter when it was, the wish in her heart never wavered at all.

"*My way of kingship is my pride.*". Still having her head up, the King of Knights said while looking straight at the other two Heroic Spirits.

"I want to save my homeland. I will change England's fate of destruction."

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"How can they drink together…"

Tōsaka Tokiomi, sitting alone in his underground workshop, once again sighed for Rider's odd behavior.

"Is it really alright to leave Archer alone?"

The magecraft communicator brought Kotomine Kirei's rather stiff words. Tokiomi laughed bitterly.

"It can't be helped."

“Since it’s a meeting between kings, how can he ignore those questions directed at himself?”

It’d be fine as long as they don’t figure out the King of Heroes, Gilgamesh’s, true power. Luckily, tonight all they did was a fight on the drinking table. As long as they don’t draw swords, Archer won’t easily show ‘Gate of Babylon’.

For Tokiomi to know the occurrences at the distant Einzbern headquarters so clearly while in his own workshop is naturally thanks to the reports of the Assassin hiding there, who passed it on via Kirei. After Rider destroyed the bounded field in the forest, Assassin also successfully infiltrated the castle while maintaining his presence concealment.

The Heaven’s Feel was already in its fourth night, and Tokiomi still hadn’t taken one step out of his house in Miyama. For days, he’s stayed inside his own house, while gathering information about the current situation of the Heaven’s Feel. He had also investigated pretty much all he needed to know about the few masters who were currently in hiding.

At this moment, the people he’s concerned about were Rider, the King of Conquerors, Alexander, and his Master, Waver Velvet.

These two had yet to fight other Servants. Tokiomi knew preciously little about them. What’s worse, due to Assassin’s mistake, the fact that Kotomine Kirei and Assassin were still alive was exposed to them.

Therefore, Kirei specifically warned Assassin to not go near Rider unless necessary. However, even with presence concealment, its power still has its limits. Disregarding Rider’s careless demeanor, the truth is that his perception is sharper than other Servants. This time, while listening in to the conversation held between these three, Kirei again told Assassin to be careful not to be discovered by Rider.

“Right, Kirei. The difference in battle strength between Rider and Archer… what do you think of it?”

“I think the key is whether Rider has a trump card even more powerful than ‘Gordius Wheel’.”

“Hmm…”

That was the problem. Compared to the four remaining Servants, only Rider makes Tokiomi and Kirei the most restless.

The Master controlling Berserker already spent a huge amount of energy, while Caster was surrounded on all sides and even had his workshop destroyed. For these two groups, their lives would die out on their own.

Gilgamesh won't lose to a wounded Saber. Although Lancer remains unscathed, his original Master had already quit the War due to his severe injuries. A Lancer controlled by an inferior magus is no threat at all.

That's to say, apart from Rider, the four remaining groups of people no longer needed to be spied upon by Assassin.

"… Right now, we have the need to try that plan."

"I see. I understand."

Without the need to speak it out, Kirei, at the other end of the communicator, already understood Tokiomi's intentions.

To obtain precious information, they can send Assassin to test it out.

Right now, while Rider and his Master were defenselessly having a banquet, it's a great opportunity for a surprise assault. At this time, victory doesn't matter; the important thing is the difference in battle strength between the enemy and their side. Of course, it'd be best if Rider can be smoothly disposed of; if not, then if they can force him into a desperate situation and get him to use his most powerful ultimate weapon, that would be enough as well.

"It'd take about ten minutes to gather all the Assassins together."

"Good, give the command. Although this is a big gamble, the silver lining is we won't be losing much even if we fail."

For Tokiomi, Assassin was just a method to obtain the Holy Grail, a prop that can be thrown away after it's been used. This understanding was also fully reflected on his pupil Kotomine Kirei.

When he finished speaking, Tokiomi changed his sitting pose and poured some more tea into his cup. He sniffed at the fragrance of the red tea delightfully and waited for the result of the plan he commanded.

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As Saber dramatically finished her sentence, everyone lapsed into silence.

The one who was most confused was Saber herself.

An awkward silence filled the room. *This made no sense.* Even though she spoke with emphasis, no one in the room was easily cowed by talk.

It was plain and clear, without any room for doubt. That was her kingship. There was nothing surprising about it. What was surprising was that no one voiced dissent or agreement – when it was obvious that those words should have been immediately said.

“Hey King of Knights, I might have heard you wrong but...?”

Rider finally broke the silence; his face was plainly confused.

“Did you say, "you want to change fate"? Which means you want to reverse history?”

“Correct. Even if the wish is something cannot be granted through a miracle, if the Holy Grail is truly omnipotent, surely...”

Saber answered haughtily. Now she understood why the atmosphere between the two kings was so special – immediately, the situation cooled down.

“Err, Saber? I’d like to confirm this..... The destruction of that Britain was in your time, right? During your reign?”

“Yes! That is why I cannot forgive myself.”

Saber answered, her tone becoming firmer.

“That's why I can't let things be that way. The destruction of my country was my fault, and thus I want to reverse it.”

Suddenly, someone laughed out loud. The laughter was a base, incomprehensible laugh. And the laugh was coming out of the mouth of that shining golden Archer.

In the face of such grave insults, Saber’s face was full of anger. The thing most precious to her was ridiculed by Archer.

“…Archer. What’s so funny?

Ignoring Saber’s wrath, the golden Heroic Spirit replied brokenly as he guffawed.

“Calling yourself a king – praised by all – a person like you could have 'regrets?' Ha! Of course, it was funny. Saber! You’re the world’s best clown!”

Beside Archer, who was laughing uncontrollably, Rider creased his brow as he stared at Saber with worry in his eyes.

“Hold on. You, hold on, King of Knights, you want to deny the history in which you’ve created?”

Saber never had any doubts to her own ideals, and of course, would not be stopped by Rider’s question.

“Correct. Why you suspect me? Why are you laughing? The country to which I sacrificed my life as a king had perished. Is there something wrong with me grieving?”

The thing answering her was again, a burst of laughter from Archer.

“Oi, oi, did you hear that, Rider! This young girl who calls herself the King of Knights – is saying something about sacrificing for her country!”

In response to Archer was Rider’s deepening silence and increasing gloomy expression. To Saber, it was just as humiliating as being laughed at.

“I don’t understand what there is to be laughing about. As kings, we should naturally sacrifice ourselves, and strive to create a better country!”

“No, you’re wrong.”

In a firm, rock-like voice, Rider objected.

“It’s not the king sacrificing for the nation. It’s the nation and the people sacrificing their lives for the king. You got it backwards.”

“What-?!”

Saber could no longer suppress her own anger. She shouted loudly.

“—Isn't that a tyrant's rule? —Rider, Archer, you bastards are nowhere near a king! Heretics!"

“True. We are tyrants; therefore, we are heroes.”

Rider answered without so much as a change in his facial expression.

“We take full responsibility for our nations. Therefore, Saber. Listen to me. If a king is not content with his own kingdom, he is a weak ruler. A weak ruler is a worse king to have than a tyrant!”

Unlike Archer, who had ridiculed her for all this time, Rider had rejected her from the basis of her ideals. Saber’s brows narrow as she retorted sharply.

“Alexander, you…Your own empire. It became four separate warring factions that quickly disappeared into the sands of history. At that ending, you don't have any regrets. If you can redo it, you'd want to save your motherland...aren't you thinking about that?”

“No.”

Raising himself to his full height, the King of Conquerors met Saber’s furious gaze with his own.

“No, I do not. If the actions of me and my generals lead to the eventual demise of my own nation, then I will accept it for what it is! Yes, I will grieve. Yes, I will shed tears. But I will not have a single regret!”

“…What?”

“Don’t you even dare suggesting something as stupid as an attempt to rewrite history! Such an idiotic action, is an insult to all of humanity who lived during my time!”

In response to Rider’s haughty declaration, Saber shook her head.

“What you’re saying is only the glory of a simple fighter. The people won’t wish for such things. Salvation would be their prayer."

“You’re saying they want the king’s salvation?”

Rider shrugged as he laughed.

“I don’t get it! What’s the point of such a useless thing?”

“That is the true worth of a king!”

This time, it was Saber’s turn to answer arrogantly.

“A correct governance, a lawful society, all subjects would probably be wishing for them.”

“Are you a slave to this “correctness,” then?”

“You could say that. The only one fit to rule is someone who would willingly give themselves up for an ideal.”

Without any hint of hesitation, the young King of Knights nodded.

“Through the king, the people could understand law and order. The king should not express something that would disappear upon the king’s death, but rather something more precious.”

At Saber who had proclaimed that firmly, while displaying a feeling as if he pitied her somewhere, Rider let out a deep sigh.

“That is not a path taken by a human being.”

“Correct. As king, we cannot hope for a normal life.”

To become the perfect ruler, to become the embodiment of the ideals, she was willing to give up her body and throw away her emotions. The life of that young woman whose name was Artoria was changed completely the moment she pulled that sword out of the stone. From then on, she became a legend of victory, a synonym of praises and dreams.

There was pain, there was disappointment, but within it was the radiance of victory. An unchangeable ideal which still supported her sword arm.

“King of Conquerors! A king like you could never understand my own beliefs! You’re nothing but a bully who was blinded by his own desires!”

Saber shouted sternly. Rider’s eyes immediately widened as he answered in response.

“A desireless king is no better than a flower vase!"

Rider’s loud roar, plus his gigantic body, made him appear more fearsome.

“Saber, you just said that you needed to 'sacrifice for your ideals.' Indeed. You’re some saint – so holy that no one could ever hope to come near you. But who would be willing to die for their empty beliefs? And who would be thinking about this so-called saint day and night? You could only comfort the people, but not lead the people. The only way to bring country and

people upon the right path is to present those desires, and the glory that could be found only in legends.”

Draining his cup, the King of Conquerors corrected.

“As king, you must have stronger desires than anyone else. You must be more magnificent, more easily angered than everyone else! He should be both pure and chaotic, a man who was more real than any other man. Only through this, could your subjects be impressed by the king, and only this, would the message of 'if only I was king, that would be wondrous' would be imprinted upon the people’s heart”

“Such a way of kingship… where on earth is the justice?”

“It doesn’t exist. Justice is unnecessary in the principles of a king. That's exactly why there is no remorse.”

“…”

He was too adamant in his opinions, and Saber was already uncontrollably angry.

Though the basis was for their people, the two’s ideals were too far apart.

One side prayed for peace.

The other dreamed about prosperity.

The king who suppressed the chaos of war and the king who stirred up the chaos of war, there was no way their ideals could have been the same.

Rider smiled as he continued bluntly.

“King of Knights. Your justice and ideals might have saved your people and country for a time, and thus, your name is praised until today, mm? Although, the people’s lives whom you saved, and their end, you did know what happened at the end, right?”

“What…did you say?”

The bloodstained sunset hill.

That sight was once again reignited in Saber’s brain.

“You wanted solely to 'save' your subjects, yet you’ve never 'guided' them. They don’t know “the king’s wishes.” You ignored the lost subjects, yet you yourself pretended to be saintly, drunk in your own narrow views.

Thus, you’re not a good king. You’re only someone who wanted to become someone who took care of the people. You’re just a little girl who spun a cocoon around yourself in order to become that idealized view.”

“I…”

There were many things she wanted to say in retort. Yet, every time she opened her mouth, she could only see the site she witnessed at Camlann.

Bodies everywhere. The blood ran like a river. There lied her subjects, friends, and loved ones.

As she pulled out that sword in the stone she knew about the prophecy. She knew that she was destined to fail, and she already understood.

But…why…

As she witnessed the sight personally, she felt surprised. She could do nothing else but pray.

Once a magus prophesied it was nearly impossible to go against fate. Yet, she still wondered, if she could have a miracle.

A dangerous thought occupied Saber’s thoughts.

If she wasn’t England’s savior, but rather a tyrant who ravished England…

The chaotic world would only become more chaotic. First, that was not her way of kingship. And no matter what perspective, she would never make that choice as Artoria.

But, if she really did that…in comparison to Camlann, which one was more tragic?

Suddenly, she felt a chill on her spine. The chill brought her back to reality.

It was Archer’s look.

The golden servant had left them alone since Saber had started arguing with Rider. He himself sat by a corner and drank quietly. His deep-red pupils started studying her, but she didn’t know when.

He said nothing, and only judging from his eyesight, one could not read his intent. But there was something lascivious in his gaze. It was as if a snake crawling up her body, bringing her humiliation and unease.

“…Archer, why are you looking at me?”

“Ah, I am merely studying your annoyed expression.”

Archer’s smile was surprisingly gentle, but at the same time, fearsome.

"It is like a virgin on which flowers are being scattered, lying on the bed. I like it."

“You bastard….”

For Saber, this was a mockery hard to be forgiven. Without any tinge of hesitation, she threw down her cup, and a sound could be heard from the sheath of the invisible sword.

But at the next moment, the thing that made the other two change their expressions was not her threatening attitude.

Moments later, Irisviel and Waver also felt something different in the surrounding air. Though it was unseen, through their skin they could feel extremely heavy murderous intent.

Strange white creatures emerged in the center of the moonlit court. One after the other, their pale white visages were like blooming flowers as they appeared. The paleness was the color of cold, dry bone.

Skull masks and black cloaks. The previously empty center court slowly became surrounded by this strange group.

Assassin…

Not only Rider and Waver knew that they were still alive, but Saber and Irisviel also learned of the detail from their conversation with Kiritsugu on warehouse street.

Assassin was not limited to the one slain near the Tōsaka residence. The reality was, there were many Assassins – an unnaturally numerous numbers of Assassins that participated in this Heaven’s feel. They all wore masks and were clad in black robes, and their body sizes differed as well. Some were giant, some were slim, somewhere short like children while some were women.

“…This is your doing? Archer.”

Archer shrugged rather innocently.

“Who knows, I have no need to understand the thoughts of mongrels"

Since this many Assassins are gathered here, their command cannot have originated from just Kirei. Perhaps it is the plans of his mentor, Tōsaka?

Because Tōsaka has declared fealty to the King of Heroes, Archer grudgingly recognized the Master. However, what Tōsaka did now was extremely displeasing.

Though Rider was the host of the banquet, Archer was the one who provided the wine. What on earth is the meaning of this? This is an action which would indirectly dirty the reputation of the King of Heroes. Shouldn't Tokiomi be able to understand that?

“Mm…so much confusion!”

Waver sighed rather desperately as he watched the opponent’s approach. Incomprehensible!

This event has far exceeded the regulation and limits of the Heaven’s Feel.

“What's the meaning of this?! Assassin appearing one after the other… There was supposed to be only one Servant of each class!”

Watching the awkward expressions of their prey, Assassins laughed evilly.

“You’re correct. We are all acting as one Servant, and each individual is only a shadow of the whole.

Waver and Irisviel could not understand that Kirei Kotomine’s Assassin existed in such a strange manner.

“The Old Man of the Mountain” – among the people who succeeded the name of Hassan-I Sabbāh, only one had the power to switch bodies.

Differing from other Hassan’s, he did not need to modify his body in any way. Or, it could be said that there was no purpose in doing so, though he was typical in terms of strength, his mind was able to change his body freely.

He could use impressive planning and tactics, understand languages of other countries, identify poisons or set traps. All in all, he was a master

assassin – able to do everything and switching in different abilities based on the requirements of his assignments. It was said that on occasions he is able to utilize strange strength and agility to use illusionary fighting styles that had been long forgotten.

He could disguise as man or woman, youth or elder – anything! He could stand quite naturally next to you. Sometimes, he could even change personality based on situation so no one can guess at his real identity.

Nobody knew the truth. Hassan may have had a unique body, but he had many different souls.

The knowledge at the time could not think of multiple personality disorder as an illness.

With said definition in modern medical sciences, it was a source of arcane “power” to Hassan the assassin. He could use the multiple personalities within him to use all kinds of different skills and draw upon their knowledge, confusing their opponents or weaving a web of defense, and kill their opponents with unexpected methods that no one could predict.

This is the assassin that Kirei had summoned – "The Hundred-Faced Hassan".

He is a Servant that had one physical body, but at the same time possessed a thousand different souls. Analyzing from this basis, “they” were initially different souls in the first place, and since they are now no longer limited by the physical body, “they” can now all materialize simultaneously into different shapes.

Of course, their strength was also limited to being just one person, and after their split the Assassins cannot hope to match the other Heroic Spirits. But because they possess the unique skills of the Assassin class, they were unparalleled in terms of spying and gathering recon.

“You mean…we’ve always been watched by these things until today?”

Irisviel murmured painfully as Saber also shivered unconsciously.

Though the opposition was not powerful, they were numerous and were able to sneak up on the group. Though she was the most powerful Servant, they were still a huge threat.

In addition, the Assassins that normally followed them like shadows had now abandoned their ability of presence concealment and fearlessly showing their figures, this meant…

“They meant business.”

Saber gritted her teeth as she realized that they had fallen into an unexpected trap.

A group of rabble that relied on their numerical strength – if confronting in a frontal assault, there was no way Saber could lose. However, that scenario was limited to the situation only – if there was only Saber to fight the battle.

Right now, Saber must protect Irisviel. No matter how weak Assassins were, they were exceptionally dangerous to humans. Even to Irisviel, a homunculus who could use magecraft flawlessly. However, magecraft alone could not stop Assassin – there was no way she could be depended to defend herself.

Thus, if she wanted to protect her companion and fight at the same time, the pressing question at hand was the numerical superiority of their enemies.

With one strike of her sword, how many Assassins could Saber stop? No, the question is no longer how many she could stop. If she missed but one person, that one might cause massive damage to Irisviel.

Right now, the question is not “Could she stop them?” but is "With one blow, could she stop all of them at once?" And then with the number of Assassins surrounding them now, it was incredibly hopeless.

However, from the Assassin's perspective, this strategy was their final resort.

Even though they fought in a group, this group was still limited in numbers. Sacrificing the most, exchanging for small amounts of survivors – this method of victory is equivalent to a suicidal charge, which is why it is only reserved for final battles.

Assassin, as a Servant, wanted the Holy Grail as well. They should not be able to stand the fact that they were merely a chess piece in Tōsaka and Archer’s game – but, they were unable to resist the Command Seal.

For tonight’s operation, Kotomine Kirei used a Command Seal. The order was “Victory no matter what sort of losses.” The Command Seal was an absolute order to Servants, and thus, they could only follow it.

Though it made them feel happy that Saber was disturbed and fearful, in reality she was not their target. Their target was Rider’s Master. Even though Rider had a powerful Noble Phantasm, its destructive powers are

unidirectional. If Assassin attacked from all sides, they should… no, they must be able to strike at the wimpy short Master.

Yes, for the King of Conquerors Alexander, it was a precarious moment.

But…why is the large Servant still drinking happily, as if nothing had happened?

“…Ri –Rider, Oi, OI….”

Despite Waver’s shouting in discomfort, Rider still didn’t act. He scanned the Assassins around him, his expression still quite even.

“Hey, kid, don't panic. It’s just a few new guests to the banquet.”

“How in the world do they look like guests?!"

Rider laughed wryly and sighed, he then greeted the Assassins that surrounded him with an idiotically calm expression.

“Fellows, could you relax a little and cut down the creepiness? As you can see, you are scaring our friends.”

Saber thought she heard him wrong. This time, even Archer’s brows creased.

“King of Conquerors. Are you trying to invite them as well?”

“Of course, the king’s words should be heard by everyone, so if someone showed up to hear, it doesn’t matter if they’re friend or foe.”

Rider said calmly as he scooped a spoonful of the red sake in the barrel and handed it to the Assassins.

“Here, don’t be shy – if you want to drink with me there are cups over there. This wine is as your blood.”

Hyunn, the sound of something flying through the empty space answered Rider's invitation.

Only the handle of the ladle remained in Rider’s hand; the spoon part has already fallen onto the ground. This was the work of one of the Assassins. The wine in the ladle fell scattered onto the grounds of the center courtyard.

“……”

Rider lowered his head and stared at the wine scattered on the ground wordlessly. The skull masks laughed in derision.

“Did you hear what I said wrongly?”

Rider’s words were calm, but clearly, the intent and tone changed. The only ones able to detect this change were the two that drank with him before.

“I said, “this wine is as your blood,” right? Since you dare to spill it onto the ground, then inevitably…”

At that moment, a whirlwind roared to life.

The wind was scorching hot and dry, as if it wanted to consume everything. The wind didn’t feel like it should come from the evening forest, or the castle’s court – the way it was roaring, it seemed that it came from the desert.

Waver spat as he tasted sand in his mouth. Sand! It was really sand that the strange wind brought. Truly the hot sand was not supposed to exist.

“Saber, and Archer, the last question of the banquet – is the king lonesome?”

Rider shouted as he stood in the center of the raging desert wind. His cape danced atop his shoulders. Somehow, he had already changed back into the proper garb of the King of Conquerors.

Archer's mouth moved, and he sniggered. There was no need to answer. He replied with his silence instead.

Saber did not hesitate either. If her own beliefs were shaken, it would be a flat denial of her days spent as king.

“A king…has no choice to be lonesome!”

Rider laughed. As if responding to the laugh, the whirlwind grew stronger.

“Wrong, wrong!! That answer is almost as good as having no answers! Let me teach you two today what it means to be a true king!”

The unknown hot wind inverted and eroded the reality.

In the strange phenomenon occurring tonight, distance and position had lost its meaning. The raging sandstorm changed all it touched.

“How-How could this..."

Waver and Irisviel gasped in surprise…only ones who understood magecraft could understand the phenomenon.

“A…Reality Marble-?!”

The earth-scorching sun; the cloudless, clear skies; stretching to the blurry end of the sandy horizon, there was nothing that obscured vision.

To think that the Einzbern castle could be changed suddenly meant that it was undoubtedly the illusion of something that eroded away the reality. It can be said that this is the uppermost limits of the miracles of magecraft.

“How could this be…. you could materialize the environment inside your mind…You aren’t a – magus?!”

“Of course, I’m not. This is not something I can do alone.”

Alexander laughed proudly as he majestically stood in the center of wide, ever stretching field.

“This land is the land in which my army once crossed. It is imprinted upon the hearts of every single one of my warriors who shared in my joys and sorrows.”

As the world changed, the positions of the five who were initially surrounded also changed.

The Assassins, originally surrounding the group have been moved aside to one side. Rider stood in the center. In the other side stood Saber, Archer, and the two Masters. This is to say that Rider stood before the Assassins by himself.

– but, could it be said that Rider fought alone?

The eyes of everyone widened as they noticed the mirage-like images that appeared around him. One, two, four…. there were more and more images, ever increasing. The colors become clearer and more solid.

“The reason why this world can exist again... is because it is printed upon *all* of our hearts.”

Under their expressions of total shock, heavily armed cavalry materialized beside Alexander. Though their faces and equipment differed, their

muscular bodies and mighty chargers displayed a fierceness that could only be found in a true army.

Only one-person present understood what this situation meant.

“All of these beings…are servants!”

He was the only Master here, and so he understood. Servant Alexander's trump card, his true noble phantasm, was now appearing before his eyes.

“BEHOLD, MY PEERLESS ARMY!”

The King of Conquerors stood before the lines of cavalry and raised both of his arms to the skies, shouting with immeasurable pride.

Ionian Hetairoi

“Their bodies may return to ash, but their spirits still hear my call! These men are my legendary heroes – my loyal followers! They’re my true friends - breaking the rules of space and time to fight once more at my side!”

“They are my treasure within treasures; they are my right to rule! They make up Alexander's mightiest Noble Phantasm – Ionian Hetairoi!!”

EX rank anti-army Noble Phantasm; the consecutive summons of multiple independent Servants.

The Lord of war, the Maharaorajah, and the founders of many dynasties – the peerless array of heroic spirits gathered here were only heard reverently in legends. All of the famed warriors standing here – all of them once fought beside Alexander the Great.

A rider less horse galloped towards Rider. It was a powerful and sleek steed. If it was human, it is probably just as impressive as any one of the Heroic Spirits standing before the king.

“Long time no see, pal.”

Rider smiled childishly as he hugged the neck of his horse. “She” was the legendary charger Bucephalus. Even the horse of the King of Conquerors became a Heroic Spirit.

Apart from shock and admiration, everyone was speechless. Even Archer, who also possessed a rank EX Noble Phantasm, was utterly silent after seeing such a radiant army.

These heroes rode alongside their king on the battlefield; their wager, like the king’s, was the king’s dream.

Not even death could stop their ending loyalty. The King of Conquerors turned it into a fitting Noble Phantasm.

Saber was shaken to her core. It wasn’t the strength of the Noble Phantasm that she was afraid of, it was the fact that such a Noble Phantasm had de-stabilized her beliefs. It shook the beliefs that she held in pride.

This flawless cooperation…

This bond with subjects that became a Noble Phantasm…

It was something that the idealistic King of Knights pursued for her whole life, yet even to the end, it was something she could not obtain.

“The King - lives to the fullest!! He needs to live more fully than anyone else! He is a figure of admiration to his people!!”

Rider’s voice boomed as he sat atop his beloved steed. The Heroic Spirits began smashing their weapons against their shields, shouting in unison.

“He gathered the will of every courageous being! He marched toward that dream and began his long conquest! That is our king! Thus-”

“The King is never lonesome! For his wishes are our wishes!”

"Indeed! Indeed! Indeed!"

The majestic cries of the Heroic Spirits pierced the heavens and flew among the stars. No matter what they faced – enemy or fortress, it was powerless before the King of Conquerors and his loyal friends. Such was their spirit they could cross the earth. With this spirit, they could split the very oceans.

And thus, the Assassins standing before them was as insignificant as clouds.

“Alright, Assassin. Let us begin.”

Rider's smiling eyes were full of ruthlessness and cruelty. To someone who ignored the king’s words and declined the king’s gift, he no longer cared to hold back.

“As you can see, my preferred battlefield is the plains. Sorry, but if it's about winning by numbers, I believe I have the advantage?"

The hundred faces among the Hassan had forgotten about the Holy Grail at this moment. Forgetting victory and the mission of the Command Seal, they had already lost sense of themselves as a Servant.

Some ran away, while some screamed fruitlessly. Some others stood dumbly on their spots. The panicked mob of skull masks were indeed just a group of rabble.

“Trample them!!"

Rider commanded without hesitation.

"AAAALaLaLaLaLaie!"

The collective roar of the Ionian Hetairoi echoed in response. The peerless army that once swept across continents once again thundered across the battlefield.

This was no longer a battle. It was a massacre.

The results of using a mill to grind a sesame seed would yield more response.

Wherever the Ionian Hetairoi rode, there was not a trace of Assassins remaining. Only a faint, faint smell of blood and some dust that was swept away remained in the air.

“WOOOOOOOAAAAAA!”

With a cheer of victory, the warriors gave dedications and praise to the king. Soon, with their mission completed, they returned to spirit form and disappeared into the distance.

And as such, the bounded field generated by these heroes also disappeared. Everyone vanished as if a bubble had been popped. The scene returned to the night air. The people present once again stood in the courtyard of the Einzbern castle.

The white, clear moonlight was silent. There was nothing in the night air.

The three Servants and two magi returned to their previous seats, raising their cups once more. The ladle – sliced to bits by the dirk – stood as a testimony to all that happened.

“—How disappointing.”

As if nothing had happened, Rider quietly murmured to himself as he finished the wine in his cup. Saber said nothing, and Archer smirked with the slightest hint of an unsatisfied expression.

“Indeed, no matter how weak the mongrels, it must have been quite the effort for you, the king, to take down this many, mm? Rider, you’re really a thorn in my eyes.”

“Of course, let’s get this straight, no matter what, we shall have a match to see which one of us is better.”

Not offended in the least, Rider smiled as he stood up.

“Anyways, we’ve said all we wanted to say, right? Let us stop here for today.”

But Saber was still dwelling on Rider’s words, and she didn’t want to let him off the hook so easily.

“Hold on, Rider, I’m not finished – “

“You, shut up.”

Tensely, Rider stopped Saber’s comment.

“Tonight, was a banquet among kings. However, Saber! I do not recognize your kingship anymore!”

“Do you still plan to mock me, Rider?"

Saber’s tone already held a great amount of irritation, but Alexander only looked at her with pity. Pulling out his sword, he waved it in the air. Suddenly, in a thunderous roar, a chariot drawn by divine bulls appeared alongside the roar. Though it was not nearly as impressive as the Ionian Hetairoi, it was still wonderous to behold.

“Hurry up, kid. Climb on.”

“…”

“Oy, kid?”

“---Ah? Ah…um…”

Ever after he personally witnessed Assassin’s effortless defeat, Waver’s heart was strangely covered by some shadow. Though it was the first time

he had ever seen such an irregular, out of the norm Noble Phantasm, so his reaction was natural. Besides, it was his own Servant's true strength – it was the first time he had seen it.

Unsteadily, Waver crawled onto the chariot. Alexander gave Saber one last glance as he began to speak with sincerity.

"Know what, little girl? It would be better for you to wake quickly from that painful dream of yours. Or else, there's going to come a day where you'll lose even the self-respect of a hero – the kingship you spoke of, that's just a spell you put upon yourself. That is all."

"No, I – "

Ignoring Saber's final retort, the chariot with flashing lightning flew into the skies. In the end, the only thing left was the sound of thunder as the chariot disappeared in the eastern skies.

"…"

To Saber, because Rider refused to listen to her speak to the last, she naturally felt wronged. Yet now, what Saber could not drop no matter what an unreasonable sense of worry was.

No mercy, no ideals, a king whose rule was based on violence in order to fulfill his own desires. Yet, even so, there was a group of such loyal followers, who was willing to swear an unbreakable fealty to him.

This was anathema to the King of Knight's ideals. She could not accept such beliefs.

Yet, Saber could not simply treat Alexander's words as a joke, either. There would come a time, where she would force him to take these words back – such words bothered Saber like a thorn in her side.

"Ignore him, Saber. All you have to do is follow in your own beliefs."

This time, the person who interjected was Archer, who had been mocking him for all this time. Hearing such strange words of encouragement, Saber answered icily.

"You were mocking me moments ago, yet you want to flatter me now, Archer?"

"Of course! Your way of kingship is the only way, without a fraction of an error. Of course, to your frail body, it must be such a great burden.

Such bitterness… such tangled webs… I couldn't help but to sincerely wish to comfort you."

Proper outer appearance, a serious voice, yet there was still an unlimited amount of lust and maliciousness hidden within his expression and tone.

As long as this golden Servant existed before her eyes, Saber would never have a single moment of confusion. Unlike Rider, who was someone she could communicate in words with, Archer was only an unforgivable enemy to her.

"Continue on your path of righteousness, Saber, and clown along the way. I like it. Saber, make me happy, and maybe I'll reward you with the Holy Grail?"

The white jade goblet shattered in Archer's hands.

"Rider has already left, the banquet is long over – Archer, leave now, or draw your sword."

Though it was invisible, Saber's waving sword nonetheless unleashed a powerful pressure. Archer, with broken goblet in hand, had no discernible change in expression. Either he was exceptionally brave or exceptionally stupid. Only one of the aforementioned possibilities.

"Oy, oy. Did you know, countless nations have been destroyed because of this cup? Ah, whatever, punishing you is pointless either way – punishing a clown like you is not fitting behavior for a king."

"Quiet. I'll warn you only once. Next time, I'll cut through you mercilessly!"

Ignoring Saber's warning, Archer smiled as he stood up.

"Try harder, O King of Knights. Sometimes, I think you're still pretty cute."

As his last words faded, Archer vanished as he turned to spirit form. As if awaking from a dream, the courtyard, without the golden light shining upon it, contained only emptiness.

And, as such, the curtains fell on a battle.

Though it was different from battle by a normal definition, but it was indeed a conflict. In order to fulfill the belief of kingship, the Heroic Spirits also had many reasons that they must wager their lives on.

As all her opponents disappeared Saber stood silently, alone, in the courtyard. Irisviel couldn't help but to feel that the scenario was familiar – wasn't such a lonely shadow the same as in yesterday's skirmish in the warehouse street?

Yet today, there was not a single shred of satisfaction upon her face even after she had defeated powerful opponents. The thoughtful, yet depressing expression made Irisviel feel uncomfortable.

"Saber……"

"When I was shouting at Rider, if he were willing to stop and listen to me, what would I have said?"

It was unclear who the question was addressing. Saber turned around as she smiled dryly, perhaps laughing at herself.

"I remember – 'King Arthur could not understand the heart of others.' Once, a knight who had left me told me that."

"…"

"Perhaps it was – among the Knights of the Round Table, the thoughts of a particular knight."

Irisviel shook her head as she spoke to Saber:

"Saber, you're the king of ideals. Your Noble Phantasm is proof of this."

Just like Rider's "Ionian Hetairoi" Saber also possessed "Excalibur" If the King of Conqueror's Noble Phantasm was his commanding abilities, then the King of Knight's Noble Phantasm was the physical actualization of her ideals. The proud aura in which it exhibited was undeniable by anyone.

"Of course, I wanted to become an ideal. In order to make no mistakes, in order to be blameless, I had no emotions and never expressed my feelings."

Giving up herself for the duty of the king.

In comparison to the limitless desire of the King of Conquerors, the road was far more distant.

"As long as the battle could be won, and the administration just, then I was a perfect king. Therefore, I wanted no understanding. Even if people thought I was arrogant and lonesome, I suppose that's also the rightful expression of the king.

But why – why am I unable to be proud of my own beliefs like Rider?”

Now, Irisviel finally understood Saber’s confusion.

The tragic ending of King Arthur was one in which everyone forsook her. Because she was unable to gain her follower’s sincere admiration, the honor of the King of Knights was tarnished.

“—Saber, even if fate cannot be avoided, no one said it’s set in stone.”

After a moment of silence, Irisviel finally spoke.

“What do you mean?”

“Fate is not something that’s predestined. The turn of the world, luck, and many unexpected events are the things that determine the final shape of destiny.

Thus, your destruction was not destined just because you were the King of Knights. Thus, you should strive for the Holy Grail.”

“…Yes, you’re right.”

Once, the king’s magician told her, if she pulled out the Sword of Destiny, then she was walking towards an unavoidable destruction. Even so, she had no regrets.

Even though she understood, she never really understood its meaning. Even if she couldn’t believe in hope, she still wanted her hope to be true.

Thus, even as she personally witnessed the predicted end in the prophecy, that was when she could no longer accept the reality.

There were only prayers, only despairing hope.

She wondered if she made a mistake along the way somewhere.

The way she had selected – there should have been a more appropriate ending…

The thought turned her into a Heroic Spirit and guided her to the Holy Grail of Fuyuki.

“Thank you, Irisviel. I almost lost the thing that was most precious to me.”

Saber nodded, her eyes were as peaceful and clear as before, shining with a confident radiance.

“My deeds as king, I cannot get any answers now. I should be asking the Holy Grail. Thus, that’s why I’m here.”

“Yes, you’re precisely right.”

Irisviel sighed in relief. The proud King of Knights doesn't suit the thoughtfully reminiscing, sad expression on her face. Following her own beliefs – that was what she should look like. That shining sword also promised her victory.

※※※※※

At Miyama, the underground basement of the Tōsaka manor was currently surrounded by a bitterly stifling silence.

“That Noble Phantasm of Rider’s…what is its power level?”

Heavily speaking into the communicator, Tokiomi asked Kirei.

“The same rank as Gilgamesh’s Gate of Babylon. In other words, Rank EX.”

A sigh followed.

Just as he had anticipated. Assassin’s sacrifice was not meaningless – at least, he was able to figure out Rider’s trump card. If he had no knowledge against Rider as he fought him, Tōsaka probably couldn’t do a thing against that super Noble Phantasm.

The only thing that exceed their expectations, was the rank of the Noble Phantasm – even if he knew about it ahead of time, could he find a way to defeat it?

As before, he had always thought his own Servant, Archer’s Noble Phantasm was the strongest. However, unexpectedly, a Servant appeared with the same level as Archer’s own. This far exceeded his expectations.

Now, a rare sense of regret slowly floated into the foremost thoughts of Tokiomi.

Perhaps throwing away the playing piece of Assassin was a deadly mistake. Against such a dangerous opponent like Rider, it may have been better for him to send a scout to gather information instead of risking a frontal assault. If he could run into a case where Rider and his Master moved separately, he might have even been able to use an assassination…

“Idiot.”

Tokiomi shook his head. It was his own fault. This wasn’t a strategy – it was only his random thoughts.

Yet, the situation was not desperate. There were many things that could still cheer him up. For example, Alexander's Master was only a third-rate magus. If the person who summoned him was Lord El-Melloi, the situation would have been much worse. The ability parameters of the Servant were also heavily dependent on the ability of the Master. Did he not also use the result of Kayneth’s dispute with his student? Looks like all the luck in this fourth Heaven’s Feel was on his side.

Looks like it was time for business. Tokiomi took his wooden staff as he calmly yet firmly stroked it. His life’s work was found in the gigantic gem that was framed near the handle, sealing a lifetime’s worth of prana.

“Since Assassin is no more, Kirei, you should not be saving your own strength anymore.”

“Yes, understood."

Across the other side came Kirei Kotomine’s quiet yet deep voice. This first-rate student and Executor, even though he had lost his Servant, still possessed a large degree of combat ability. Now, because he could no longer command Assassin, he had no need to disguise himself – it was time for him to unleash his own abilities.

As predicted, the second part have begun. Based on the information gathered by Assassin, he shall mobilize Gilgamesh and begin his assault. As for the solution against Rider, he’ll slowly find an answer to that.

Finally, it was time to step out of his territory and step into the battlefield.

Silently enduring the pains of the Magic Crests, Tokiomi stood from his chair.

Postface

Higashide Yuuichirou

Everyone has waited long for the publication of the second volume of Fate/zero.

Compared to the small struggles of the prequel-- from this volume of increasingly intense battles on, the Grail War has finally officially begun.

The many stories surrounding the event of Kiritsugu destroying an entire building, mentioned in the glossary of Fate/stay night, and the constant mentions of the Fourth Heaven's Feel in Fate/hollow ataraxia, have also gradually come to light.

For example, in Fate/hollow ataraxia, Saber had said something like this; does everyone still remember?

"U-unless this is the octopus Shirō and the rest were talking about? I can't imagine that sort of magic fish!

...what? You mean that planar monster that cannot be cut up no matter how one tries to do so, you would go so far as to make me eat that!" (From Fate/hollow ataraxia)

Needless to say. What is mentioned here is the battle against Caster in this volume. Then "in reality Saber, what you eat is actually what comes out from inside that thing." If one were to say this. She would certainly be very angry. It’s definitely going to give her a huge shock.

And many other stories related to the Fate series, when readers reach that part of the game again after having finished reading this book in its entirety, will certainly incite interest.

Then, though this should not be said in front of readers, but everyone probably already knows this anyway-- the ending of Fate/zero has already been decided.

Only Emiya Kiritsugu survives, and all the other people are sacrificed.

Though Saber emerges victorious, she is unable to obtain the Grail.

Not only that, under the control of the Command Seals she destroyed with her own hands the Grail that carried her wishes--

And, leaving only the one fact of 'Fuyuki's greatest catastrophe'.

This is an extremely cruel story with absolutely no salvation.

The endings of Fate/stay night are many-- tragic endings, happy endings-- I believe that players should already understand, Fate/zero is not like that.

Because this is a 'past' story that happened before Fate/stay night. Shirō became troubled in the Fate route because of what happened in the past; what has already passed, no one has the ability to change.

There is only one ending; this cannot be altered.

Which basically means that the many charming characters that debut in Vol.2 of Fate/zero only have an end of being eradicated.

For to a story with only tragic outcomes like this, perhaps there will be people who are not willing to continue reading. After all, as far as stories that induce a heavy heart are concerned, there will probably be those who would rather keep their distance.

But, but.

Even if you are like that, I believe you will have the desire to continue reading Fate/zero.

Because here there is Emiya Kiritsugu, the Emiya Kiritsugu that even Shirō, after abandoning his dreams, and Saber, who had only seen Kiritsugu's callous magus side, had not seen.

In order to allow everyone in this world to be happy--

Here, with such foolish dreams, is Emiya Kiritsugu. Here, with the terrible fear of losing the person he loves, is Emiya Kiritsugu. Here, extraordinarily formidable, is Emiya Kiritsugu.

So, all of you probably do want to read on. For instance, Emiya Kiritsugu's last words in Fate/stay night.

"Ahah-- don't worry."

Wanting to read this line.

◆

Other than this, in Fate/zero there are many other mysteries.

For example. In this volume there was in fact no mention of the battle between Alexander and Gilgamesh; facing these absolutely strong two who possess powerful Noble Phantasms, how should Saber deal with them?

And the unidentified Black Knight-- what is his (her?) origin? And why suddenly attack Saber?

And what endings will come of the goings-on between Matō Kariya, Tōsaka Aoi and Tōsaka Tokiomi?

(Of course, it will definitely be a tragic ending.)

We already know all the endings in Fate/zero.

But we do not know the 'paths' that lead to this ending. And we do not know, those warriors who are destined for destruction-- how they fight, how they perish, even how they fall.

Those who wish to solve these mysteries, those who wishes to know their 'path' and everyone who has similar thoughts, probably very much wants to continue reading Fate/zero.

And, one more thing.

In reality, Fate/zero is a story of salvation.

Even though the Fourth Heaven's Feel ends with a tragic outcome, Emiya Kiritsugu saved Emiya Shirō. And Saber being summoned forth as Emiya Shirō's Servant is also a fate that has already been determined.

Emiya Kiritsugu, tormented, despairing, then dying after being saved by the existence of Emiya Shirō-- even if this is mocked by his mortal enemy Kotomine Kirei, it should probably count as a happy ending.

Whether for Emiya Kiritsugu who walks towards an end of darkness and despair, or the other magi and Servants who joined the Heaven's Feel with their many different wishes-- I implore them, and the readers, to witness the process of this entire event.

◆

Then, before I wrote this postface.

Urobuchi Gen said to me, "Before writing the postface, what about looking at the manuscript of Vol. 2?" I, full of joy, immediately agreed: "Greatly honored to be allowed to read this work, please let me read it, let me read it

at once." Then I, at maximum happiness, immersed myself in the joy of reading.

Rather than being a privilege for people involved, this could be compared to a sort of Noble Phantasm.

This is a sort of Noble Phantasm with the name of 'dastardly fantasy'.

In this present moment, this thrill of 'reading' before anyone else. Ohoho, kekeke. Just like Waver in Vol. 1.

So, I very solemnly guarantee to the readers, in Vol. 2 there will definitely be stories that are even more satisfying. Readers will probably have thoughts similar to mine after having finished reading.

Indeed, Fate/zero has brought us even more powerful new shockwaves. That is--

Alexander, not wearing pants--

/*is dragged offstage, end*/